

Right to Education

Everyone has the Right to Education

"The right to education is a fundamental human right and basic to human freedom. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights underlines the fact that "Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights". Israel's systematic obstruction of education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip not only violates the human rights of individuals, it is an attack on the development of Palestinian society as a whole.

The Right to Education Campaign at Birzeit University calls on trade unions, education institutions, organizations and social and political movements around the world to affiliate to the Right to Education Campaign and support students, teachers and education in Palestine."

Birzeit University Right to Education Campaign
Al Quds University

Al Quds University in Jerusalem is unique in its location and the difficulties it faces, since it is the only Palestinian Arab higher education institution in this central region that is closest to the heart of the conflict. Al Quds University has 10 faculties, including arts, science, medicine, health sciences and law; it serves a student population of about 6000 in 2002, and has more than 700 faculty and staff. Main administration offices are located in East Jerusalem.

Teaching is conducted at four main campuses. Two of the campuses are in East Jerusalem, and the largest campus is in Abu Dis (next door to Aizaria), suburb a few kilometers to the east. Other faculties are in Ramallah/Al Bireh, and are similarly separated from East Jerusalem by major Israeli checkpoints and occasional 'minor' checkpoints in between. These 'checkpoints' are more than places where the Israeli army stops people or checks identification. They have developed into real internal borders, with huge concrete blocks and barbed wire, to segregate and to stop movement.

Amira Haas writing in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz describes one student's life as a medical student in Jerusalem/Abu Dis/Aizaria:

<http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article346>

News: May 2006 Oxford Students' Union passed a twinning motion to twin with Birzeit University

Letter from a Group of High School Graduation students from Aizariyah:

Composed during Last Graduation Preparatory Lesson on the Occasion of General Secondary Certificate English Language Exam

Bethany-Al Aizariyeh, June 10th, 2006

Dear British Friends of Palestine,

as the Wall is turning our village into a large open-air prison, immobilizing, suffocating and depressing its men, women, youth, children and seniors, our group is happy to hear about solidarity and concerns that you have shown regarding Palestine and its people. In these days, hundreds of graduation students of our three sister villages of Aizariyeh, Abu Dees and Sawahreh are sitting together for final examinations. Marking the ending of our childhood and the start of taking decisions for ourselves, we are also being told by the elders that never have the Tawjihi (graduation) exams been so overshadowed by the uncertainty and hardships. We now know how much our families and society have sacrificed in order to secure for us a kind of future in which we would have a place to live, work and pray safely, with chances to become contributing members of the community, to help build a life of security, peace, justice for all, secure food and shelter, health, education and healthy development of those who are coming after us, our small brothers and sisters. Since the beginning of the second Intifada (Uprising), the closures, checkpoints, "security" and punitive measures have deprived us of our childhood. Now the Wall, electric fence and the complete restrictions of movement enforced by the border crossings, such as Olive Tree Checkpoint marking the final limit where we can reach, are denying us any prospects of a future. They prevent us from passage to Jerusalem, our most precious neighbor and capital for all Palestinians. Unlike graduation students in other parts of the world, we feel that the final examinations are not our gate to a better life. We do not have even the freedom of choice where and what we want to study. When the Uprising started, we were only small, innocent children. Our parents were not able to work any more and get us enough food, clothes, school supplies.

We had no place to play or activities to do. All we felt was suffering. We still do not know why we are being punished for something we have not done and why nobody is listening to our voice. We have so much to say and do. We have our lives to take care of and our country to build. We want to have friends abroad, be able to travel, see other places and meet other people, to learn about their countries and tell them about ours. It is a beautiful land, and the world should preserve its history and culture, not help destroy it. Many of us would like to go to the university but the parents have no means to make it possible, although we are all good students. We will try to continue with our English classes, in order to be able to communicate with the outside world and speak for ourselves. We hope that some of you will be our guests and that we will become good friends, which will learn about each others and respect their differences. You can also write us, be our pen pals.

Building of peace starts when people are willing to listen to each other.

Hope to see you in Palestine soon,

Aizariyeh students' group.

Education in Aizaria:

There are 7 public and 5 private schools in Bethany. Approximately 10 kindergartens. Three boarding schools, including two orphanages. Of the seven public, 3 are secondary and the rest primary, along with the private ones - up to ninth grade. Four are boys' and the rest girls or co-educational. Average number of students - 200+. No private secondary, high schools, or colleges either. High school graduates rate: 60% for female students, 35% for male students -an estimate. In spite of all sanctions against the newly elected government, educational and medical sectors are still fully functioning, in spite of the fact that most of the personnel have not received salaries for a number of months. There are chronic and acute lack of some services and equipment in a number of schools. Facilities like sport facilities are almost non-existent. This, of course, impairs the educational process. However, for all these obstacles, attendance rate is surprisingly high as is outstanding performance rate in most of the schools. There are hundreds of talented children. Aizaria is planning to open its own culture center.

Email from Aizaria May 2006:

Suzana's Reflections , 15 years
of cohabitating with the Palestinians in Aizariyeh-Abu Dees

The two sisters or Abu Dees - Aizariyeh Symbiosis

Today, as start of Tawjihi (high-school graduation) exams marks a milestone of Palestinian life's occasions, every person in our community wishes success to nearly 800 high school students heading for the first exam, hoping for an academically advanced generation that would insure prosperity of the society as it insecurely floats in dire straits of 21st century.

Never is the coexistence and unity of the three southern suburbs of Jerusalem behind the Wall more visible than on this occasion, when students from each sit together for the examinations that also mark their common initiation into adult life.

Mothers of Abu Dees and Aizariyeh, along with those of Sawahreh, another adjacent village before the extension into barren Wadi Nar (Valley of Fire), will share the collective joy and celebrations following the announcement on those who passed the examinations. Many of those students who take the General Secondary Exam Certificate will keep meeting at AlQuds University, and only yesterday, we attended a wedding, bridegroom being from Abu Dees

and bride from Aizariyeh.

Coexisting for hundreds of years and sharing lands, a wadi, resources, people and facilities; at nights their lights winking at each others from the opposite hills, they form a horseshoe shape and join hands at the AlQubsa junction at the Wall. Once important posts on North-South East-South axis on the maps of Palestine, they still regain the air of importance about themselves. Prior to the Wall, the path would naturally flow into Ras AlAmud Jerusalem neighborhood, and on to downtown Jerusalem, along the 2 km road. Alternatively, to the opposite direction, one could freely travel to Jericho or take the road through Abu Dees to Bethlehem, and further to Khalil/Hebron. The strategic significance of their position thus cannot be denied or overlooked either. It had for centuries provided livelihoods for the local people and shaped their lives and fates. Having lately "outgrown their shoes", both villages started spreading and reaching unto each other, so their respective boundaries cannot be clearly defined. At this moment, both are practically sandwiched between the Wall, barring their horizon, and Ma'aleh Adumim colony.

Nevertheless, it is more than just geography's work that has influenced their existence. Human forces have shaped geography adapting it to their unique and specific needs, aspirations and dreams, creating these unique communities, unlike any others in Palestine and the Arab world: both are proudly clinging to the traditional way of life but could not prevent stepping into the 21st century of technological wonders feeding on human spirit and creativity. Each remains fiercely autonomous, special, and different in its life-style, but their coexistence is enriched by mutual respect, collaboration and exchange. There is a big question whether they will be able to resist and follow their own paths against the advancement of globalization, too.

Here is another example of successful sisterhood: each morning hundreds of primary, secondary and university students, teachers, officials and workers can be seen traversing the invisible boundaries in pursuing education and careers. Great number of students from Aizariyeh study at Abu Dees schools, which are bigger, better equipped and higher achieving at the educational front. Schools of Abu Dees not only support the most common literary stream syllabus, but also scientific stream, unavailable in Aizariyeh boys' schools. Abu Dees Secondary Girls School also offers commercial stream.

One educational facility in Abu Dees deserves special praise: the Arab Institute, one of the most prestigious secondary schools for male students in the West Bank. It is attended by approximately 1000 students, has a boarding section for the disadvantaged boys, turns out outstandingly achieving students at the General Secondary Certificate Exam (GSCE) and provides university scholarships and support to the needy and academically minded students.

In general, Abu Dees schools provide services to twice the number of students

in Aizariyeh schools. Abu Dees teaching personnel brings significant input to Aizariyeh schools, which, unfortunately, have a chronic shortage of local personnel and low ratio of success at the GSCE. Two of the school principals there are Abu Dees residents.

Abu Des also remains stubbornly rural in its architecture and life-style, as opposed to Aizariyeh with its high-rise buildings, outgrowing the available space and eating up all the green areas. More business-minded, it had not long ago been one of the most favored commercial spots for both Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim residents. The population of Abu Dees is more homogeneous, all inhabitants belonging to only few families, while the population of Aizariyeh is highly heterogeneous, consisting of indigenous families, out comers and a large refugee sub-community. There is also expatriate group to which I belong. In addition, AIAizariyeh is afflicted by chronic water shortages, and lack of facilities and green areas.

Both villages have obviously had a very successful and peaceful coexistence, shoulder-by-shoulder, people and especially children meeting together many times a year for collective occasions, such as Palestinian Child Day in April. Not a small deal in the harsh conditions the Palestinians have been experiencing, is it?

We hope that they will continue building the future together, their children studying, playing, dreaming and growing together, sharing joys and pains, giving us constant inspiration for our future projects, which will always be our gift to children of Jerusalem Suburbs behind the Wall: Aizariyeh, Abu Dees and Sawahreh - our turf. (Below are a couple of photos presented by our group to both, Aizariyeh and Abu Dees schools.)

Theatre play at the UNRWA Co-Ed school, Abu Dees

Jeel Al Amal (Generation of Hope) Orphanage and School, Aizariyeh - same play