

# The International Board on Books for Young People In Palestine

By Mary Fasheh



IBBY stands for The International Board on Books for Young People. It is a non-profit organization that was founded in Zurich, Switzerland in 1953 by Jella Lepman. Lepman believed that books build bridges of understanding and peace between people. She also believed that after going through wars children need not only food, medicine, clothes, and shelter, but also books. With 75 National Sections in the world, IBBY is an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together. IBBY's mission revolves around six key goals:

1. To promote international understanding through children's books.
2. To give children everywhere the opportunity to have access to books with high literary and artistic standards.
3. To encourage the publication and distribution of quality children's books, especially in developing countries.

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Progressive Librarian would like to thank IBBY Palestine for permission to republish the children's stories in the main body of the article, the "Testimony of Al-Ataa' Librarian" in Appendix 2, and the images in the article and Appendix 4.

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4. To provide support and training for those involved with children and children's literature.
5. To stimulate research and scholarly works in the field of children's literature.
6. To protect and uphold the rights of the child according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Establishment of the National Section of IBBY in Palestine (PBBY)**

Being a member of IASL (International Association of School Librarianship), which has a connection with IBBY, I came across IBBY's Journal *Bookbird* while taking a summer course on children's literature at the College of Librarianship in Wales. I became interested in the journal and in joining IBBY as a member. In December 1995, I wrote a letter to the Secretariat of IBBY asking to join the organization. I was informed that individual membership is only available to people in countries that have a national section of IBBY. I wrote to the Secretariat again requesting the establishment of a National Section in Palestine, like that of other IBBY national sections around the world. In February 1996 their answer was: IBBY's membership policy accepts only independent nations as national sections, and since Palestine is not yet constituted as a state, the application to join IBBY has been rejected. Instead, it was recommended that I join the national section of Israel.

To this I replied that the National Section of Israel represents Israeli citizens, not Palestinians. After a long struggle of more than ten years and with the support of General Director of Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ms. Jehan Helou, Palestinian membership of individuals was accepted and was announced at the International Book Fair for Children in Bologna. However, Palestine still did not get the approval to establish a National Section. The struggle continued, with support from the national sections of Ireland, Sweden, Iran, and especially the British IBBY Section, which prepared the following motion defending the rights of Palestinian organizations and individuals to form a national section:

We draw the attention of the General Assembly to the exclusion from IBBY of the Occupied Territories. The Occupied Territories, known by its inhabitants as Palestine, is a country. There are persons and organizations within it who seek to form a national section that is comparable with the aims of IBBY. It is not the case that the Occupied Territories form part of the country of Israel. Therefore, it cannot be said that Palestinians and their organizations in the Occupied Territories are already represented by the Israeli national section. They have observer status at the United Nations. The current position in which Palestinians can only join IBBY as individuals is a barrier to

them furthering IBBY's fundamental aims within their country. In order that IBBY fulfils its aims in relation to this part of the world, we propose that the General Assembly accept the right of Palestinians to form their own national section. (IBBY UK, 2002).

As the Executive Committee could not reach a decision, the matter was put to the General Assembly where the motion passed by majority vote. During the Children's International Bologna Book Fair in April 2003, Palestine was officially declared the 65th IBBY National Section, with full membership of IBBY like the other national sections in the world.

IBBY/Palestine (PBBY) is an independent, nonpolitical, non-denominational organization that aims to encourage the development of children's literature. Its primary objective is to promote awareness of the importance of children's literature and the necessity of cultural exchange among people regarding children's literature. PBBY pursues these goals by encouraging the development of children's literature in Palestine; supporting the provision, publishing, and distribution of quality books for children; encouraging reading habits; promoting creative writing; encouraging research in children's literature; and promoting cultural exchange through translation and participation in international cultural activities. In the beginning, PBBY was hosted by Tamer Institute for Community Education. Later, PBBY chose another hosting organization, the Ma'an Development Center, also located in Ramallah.

### **Activities of PBBY in the Gaza Strip**

The "IBBY Fund for Children in Crisis" uses books, reading, and storytelling to help children whose lives are disrupted by natural disasters, war, or civil strife. Human history has endured the horror of wars, resulting in human loss and suffering. The sophisticated weaponry of modern warfare has produced a huge surge in the loss of civilian lives, with children as the main victims of these destructive wars. As a result, millions of children have died, or have been seriously injured or permanently disabled.

Palestinian children are a stunning example of the unjustifiable suffering of children. They are the victims of the tragic dispossession of the Palestinian people in 1948 and 70 years of ruthless occupation by Israel. Palestinians suffer from killings, house demolitions, detention, confiscation of land, uprooting of trees, closures and checkpoints, shortage of power and gas, etc., and the United Nations has not used its mandate to put an end to it.

Children in Gaza are growing up in one of the harshest settings in the world. Gaza is the most densely populated area on earth. Recent statistics show that there are approximately 7,500 persons per square

kilometer in Gaza (Al-Hasayna, 2018). The majority of its population consists of refugees uprooted from their homeland in 1948. During the long years of occupation, Gaza has suffered most from the Israeli atrocities. Gaza is a real prison—its people cannot travel to the West Bank and have great difficulties travelling to the outside world via Egypt. It is controlled by air, land, and water.

The project of “Children in Crisis” in Gaza started in 2008 to address the horrific situation of Palestinian children. PBBY chose two of the most affected and marginalized areas in the Gaza Strip to establish libraries. It selected the community-based centers of the al-Ataa’ Charitable Society in Beit Hanoun and the Society for Development of Rural Women in al-Shawka Area - Rafah to be partners, since they have grassroots support for the children and communities to sustain and promote libraries. Al-Ataa’ library is situated in the northern community of Beit Hanoun near the Israeli border, while al-Shawka library is in the south in the town of Rafah, close to the border crossing with Egypt.

PBBY selected and purchased quality books for the two libraries; provided necessary furniture suitable for library activities (tables, chairs, shelves, and stationery); chose a suitable coordinator, in addition to two librarians/facilitators, who could classify books and implement creative activities with the children; and provided training in library skills for the librarians/facilitators. PBBY also proposed that the two libraries offer bibliotherapy activities for the traumatized children of Gaza through storytelling, drama, creative writing and illustrating, and it offered to help the libraries create an appealing place for the children to develop their reading habit and to learn to read critically. This work began in January 2008, although it took a long time before the books reached Gaza.

The two libraries open in the morning and in the afternoon for children 8-18 years, their parents, and the local community. An average of 50-60 persons, children and adults, attend the library activities daily. Most of the activities are repeated monthly. They include story writing and telling, creative writing, production of stories and plays, educational competitions, discussion of books, wall magazines, reading of poetry, role playing, face painting, cultural contests, drawing, projection of cartoon films, games, etc. The children of Gaza found a safe refuge, as long as there was no war raging around them. The libraries became a place of security for the children, who used to spend their time on the streets, making them easy targets for Israeli soldiers. Furthermore, the libraries give moral support, and promote independence and creativity among children.

It is worth mentioning that the behavior of children has improved tremendously since their participation in the library activities. Their

behavior has become less violent and their reading skills have improved. One success story concerned a boy named Mohammad, whose energy was turned from violence into activities and games. Additionally, integration of the two sexes has become easier and more acceptable.

Both libraries participate annually in the Reading Campaign sponsored by Tamer Institute for Community Education. Also, the two libraries send monthly or bimonthly reports of their activities to the Administrative Committee of PBBY in Ramallah. It is unfortunate that the West Bank personnel cannot travel to Gaza to check, to encourage, and to assist the people there.

## **Destruction of the Libraries in Gaza**

### *Al-Shawka Library*

Gaza has been attacked many times. In 2007 al-Shawka was invaded by a special Israeli troupe of 350 soldiers with their tanks and dogs. They erected check points and started arresting any passerby, regardless of age. They broke into institutions and local societies, devastating them by breaking computers and tearing members' personal identity cards. A new war hit al-Shawka in 2008 and eight children, members of the library, were killed. Then, the following January two active members of the library, Mousa Barbakh and his cousin Yousef Barbakh, 15 and 13 years old, were killed by Israeli rockets, and one child lost his leg because of a bullet (IBBY Palestine, 2010). The library building was damaged again in 2012. Finally, during the 51-day war in 2014, the Israeli occupiers caused further damage to the library when they used it as a barrack. They destroyed the computer, the hard disc, and bookshelves, and they tore books. After each of these invasions, PBBY replaced the damaged books and shelves. [For another description of the damage suffered by al-Shawka library, see Appendix 1 at the end of this article.]

### *Al-Ataa' Library*

Al-Ataa' library had 5,996 books, provided by PBBY, Tamer Institute for Community Education and the United Nations Relief, and Work Agency for the Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). Unfortunately, in 2008 Israeli occupiers destroyed a large section of the al-Atta' building, and two sisters Lama and Haya, members of the library, were killed by Israeli rockets (IBBY Palestine, 2010). The physical destruction was even worse in 2014. At dawn on Sunday July 18, 2014, the Israeli Occupation forces targeted the al-Ataa' Charitable Society, resulting in the partial destruction of the building and the destruction of the PBBY library. Then at dawn ten days later, just before the humanitarian truce ended, the Israeli Occupation forces targeted the Society

again. A direct rocket from an F-16 destroyed the whole building, leveling it to the ground. With this, Beit Hanoun lost an essential institution that had served many parts of the Palestinian community: children, women, young people and those with special needs. Since 2015 the al-Sikka library has been operating as its temporary replacement until the rebuilding of al-Atta' is finished. [For other accounts of the destruction in Beit Hanoun, see Appendices 2 and 3.]

Ten years have passed since the IBBY libraries were set up in Gaza. PBBY continues to provide books for the libraries and small, token salaries for the two facilitators. After the war in 2014, PBBY provided the children of the two libraries with winter clothes and book bags through a fund from the United Palestinian Appeal. For many children, the PBBY libraries are a sanctuary and place of hope. These children continue to need our support and attention, and most importantly, the assurance that they have not been forgotten. Fortunately, IBBY continues to support Gaza libraries. At its biennial congress in 2014 it issued a heartwarming appeal for funds to reconstruct the Gaza libraries destroyed by the war that year (IBBY, 2014). And in April 2017 IBBY issued yet another appeal (IBBY, 2017). Since then, a large sum has been donated by the family of the internationally prominent children's writer Katherine Paterson. Despite the continuing attacks on Gaza, PBBY persists in keeping the two libraries open for the children of Gaza.

## **PBBY Projects in Gaza**

### *Workshops*

PBBY has arranged three kinds of workshops in the Gaza Strip. The first was a training workshop in library skills, targeting public librarians, schoolteachers/librarians, and librarians from community-based children's libraries. The training was aimed at giving librarians the skills to organize and fill the library with creative activities, promoting reading and critical thinking. The main subjects of training were: making dolls/puppets and using them in storytelling, book classification based on the Dewey Decimal Classification system, analysis of text to help the child understand the story better, story selection to help the librarian choose appropriate books for different age groups, expressive art, drama in the library, and bibliotherapy/treatment through books.

A second series of training workshops have focused on creative writing and drawing. Several workshops have been conducted on mentoring children in these areas. The children have been eager to write about their situation, the war, the aggression, their martyred

relatives, and their wishes and hopes for a peaceful future. Two samples of their stories and hopes have been translated into English:

**“A Beautiful Dream,” by Mariam Al-Hassy, 12 years old**

The war on Gaza continued for 22 days, while we dreamt that it would soon end. This horrible war left a great deal of devastation and grief. It took away mothers and fathers, and it made a lot of families homeless. Even the schools weren't spared the violence of occupation—my own school was hit with missiles from fighter jets.

I always dream that I have a small house in my beloved country, Palestine. There I can have peace and security. From there I carry my books and head to school without being afraid or sad, just like the other children of the world who have safe lives.

I really hope the rest of the world hears my wish, and that I will see the days when my wish comes true. (Al-Hassy, M., 2009).

**“Don't I Have the Right to Live Happy,”  
by Amal Al-Hassy, 10 years old**

I am a Palestinian girl and I have been through so much. I was so afraid when the war started. I couldn't sleep, I would keep thinking and worrying and asking the same question over and over again: “What's going to happen to me and my family?” I have the right to live in peace without fear. I have the right to live happy. I wish I could live like the children in the rest of the world, to have parks and playgrounds, where we can have fun, instead of playing in the streets, where it has become scary. A lot of my friends were killed in the streets while they played.

I was happy when the occupation army pulled back because that meant my family and I are safe now. But I was so sad to see the houses, schools, and universities completely destroyed. What is it that we have done to deserve this? What are we supposed to do now?

I don't want to be scared anymore. I want to be happy and to build a future. I want to make my dreams come true and be a doctor who takes care of people. I am an innocent Palestinian girl. I don't carry a gun; I only carry a book and pencil so I can learn. (Al-Hassy, A., 2009).

Finally, one of the workshops has focused on working with children with special needs. There are large numbers of children with special needs in Gaza. Many of them were wounded and disabled by the Israeli attacks on Gaza. In 2009 and 2012, IBBY Palestine, in cooperation with the Red Crescent Society in Gaza, arranged two workshops to train deaf children, for PBBY believes in the necessity of empowering children with special needs and helping them to integrate in society. The children were divided into two groups. One group was trained in drama and doll/puppet making and the other was trained in creative writing and drawing. The children proved to have great talent. Two samples of stories written by children with hearing impairments about their life and aspirations and have been translated into English:

**“I Like to Be,” by Abdallah Khalil Kallab, 14 years old**

I wish for myself and others to live in love and dignity. I wish that the world was modest and did not differentiate between rich and poor, big and small, disabled and healthy. I was born with a hearing impairment. I felt that people around do not want to play or befriend me because I do not hear and speak and this made me sad. However, my family loves me and never neglected me. They sent me to school for children with hearing impairment like me. There we studied like other children. I started to read, write and understand what was said. I did not feel shy about myself because I did not participate in the different aspects of life. I started to love life and knew what I wanted. Then I felt the beauty of life and friends and everything that surrounds me. (Kallab, n.d.).

**“A Stormy Day,” by Huda Mahmoud al-Farra. 12 years old**

I was standing near the window watching the kids playing football in front of our house. Suddenly, the sunlight disappeared, and the sky was filled with dark clouds. The kids stopped playing and started looking at the clouds that filled the sky. The rain started falling accompanied by strong wind, blowing from all directions. The kids went home, and the ball was left alone in the street swinging right and left nonstop. I closed the window and went to sit near the fire ignited by my father, and I was thinking about the ball that was left alone in the street. The weather outside was very cold and the wind was strong and scary. As I fell fast asleep, I heard a knock on our door. Our neighbor Abu Ass'ad was screaming and asking for help because the wind blew the weak roof off his house and the water filled his house. My father got up and helped our neighbor and his family by inviting them to sleep in our house and to eat supper. In the morning the rain and the wind had stopped. We helped our neighbor to fix the roof of their house and then I saw the kids playing again with the ball.

My wishes: I like to play and enjoy my friends. I do not like to fight nor see the kids fighting at the school. I wish to be a teacher at the Red Crescent Society.

*Gardens of Hope*

The book *Gardens of Hope*, written by Palestinian children and youth in Gaza and West Bank, came to life in 2009 as a result of a fantastic cooperation with the newly established United Arab Emirates/IBBY and Kalimat Publishing House in Sharjah, UAE. The illustrations were drawn by children from the Emirates. The promotion advertisement for the book said, “Children of Palestine write about pain and



Figure 1. Cover of *Gardens of Hope*



the children of Emirates color hope.” The book, which is in Arabic and English, was distributed freely at the Sharjah and Beirut Book Fairs, and in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip). The beautiful book cover was illustrated and donated by the Tunisian artist Ra’ouf al-Qarrai.

### *Educational, Cultural, and Entertaining Trips*

IBBY Palestine has arranged educational, cultural, and entertaining trips for the children of al-Shawka/Rafah and Sikka/Beit Hanoun libraries to relieve them from their psychological stress caused by the siege, lack of electricity, and the bad economic situation. During one of the trips, the children visited al-Bayara Garden Park, which belongs to Nawa Center, where they were entertained by group games, clowns, and storytelling at the puppet theater. They also visited the museum at the Municipality of Deir al-Balah. Finally, they danced, sang Palestinian songs, and performed a wedding event, with bride and groom, and ended the trip at the Amusement Center. It was an enjoyable event, made possible through a donation provided by the family of Marianne De Doncker, late wife of IBBY’s President Wally De Doncker, who loved children and whose happiness came from seeing children learning, playing and enjoying themselves.

### *PBBY Activities in the West Bank–Ramallah*

PBBY tries to hold at least one meeting per month, which normally includes a discussion of various matters related to children’s literature, a get-together with a local or foreign writer, a presentation or discussion of a book, and a discussion of a draft story of a Palestinian writer. PBBY tries, when possible, to implement activities that promote intercultural exchange and international solidarity. Among the local writers, PBBY invited the following Palestinians to speak about their books: Mahmoud Shukair, Sonia Nimer, Ahlam Bsharat, Mohammad Zakaria, Sharif Kanaana, Khalil Nakhleh, Nadi al-Deek, Rose Shomali, and Salman Natour. Foreign and international writers who have spoken include Elsa Marston (U.S.), Beverly Naidoo (South Africa), Ulf Stark (Sweden), Anne Carter (Canada), Luciana Savaget (Brazil), and Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young (U.S.). The meeting with Beverly Naidoo, was especially popular among the children and youth in Palestine after her two famous books *Journey to Jo’burg* and *Chain of Fire*, translated into Arabic, came into their hands. Palestinian children loved the books and connected with South African children’s suffering and struggle.

All these activities have taken place in Ramallah because PBBY’s personnel live in Ramallah. It is difficult, however, for people who live in other cities to come to Ramallah to attend events due to a fear of facing unexpected checkpoints on the roads.

### *Workshops in Ramallah*

In 2003, 2007, and 2009 PBBY also arranged workshops for adults, including teachers, writers and others interested in children's literature. One of these was a workshop on children's literature conducted by Swedish expert Mrs. Ulla Lundqvist. Others included a workshop on books written by the Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren, and an intensive five-day workshop conducted by an expert from France.

### *“Librarians and Archivists for Palestine (LAP)– One Book Many Communities” Project*

A group of librarians and archivists from the USA and Europe came to Palestine in 2013 to meet with fellow librarians in Palestine. They visited various kinds of libraries: academic, public, children's, and specialized libraries. One of their projects, known by the title “One Book Many Communities” is a yearly event where a Palestinian book is chosen by the group (LAP); and then many communities, in various countries, choose to participate through reading and discussing that book. Each community arranges an event for the occasion and reports on it to LAP. In 2015, the first chosen book was *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa; in 2016, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* by Suad Amiry; in 2017, *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani; and in 2018, *Code Name: Butterfly* by Ahlam Bsharat. PBBY has participated in these events in cooperation with the Children and Youth Section of Ramallah Public Library, and Tamer Institute for Community Education.

### *Honoring Palestinian writers*

IBBY Palestine organized a special meeting in December 2014, in cooperation with Tamer Institute for Community Education, to honor Palestinian writers, whose books entered IBBY's Honor Lists for 2012 and 2014 and to celebrate children's literature in Palestine. The event included speeches, exhibition of books and children's writings, and handing Honor List Certificates to the distinguished winners for their excellence.

### **PBBY's Activities in Jerusalem–Al-Saraya Center for Community Services**

Israel has occupied the old city of Jerusalem since 1967 and is trying desperately to make it Jewish. The Israeli Ministry of Education interferes with the Palestinian school curriculum and enforces its laws on it. Because Jerusalem is under siege, people from the West Bank cannot enter Jerusalem unless they are over 50 years old or have an Israeli permit, which is difficult to get.

Al-Saraya Center for Community Services<sup>1</sup> was registered in 1990 as a nonprofit organization. The Center is located in the Islamic Quarter in the Old City, in an area called Aqabat al-Saraya which is a few meters away from the Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Center devotes its services to ease the impact of the suffering inflicted on its people and children since 1967.



Figure 2. Workshop on creative writing in Jerusalem

At a request from al-Saraya Center, PBBY agreed to help the people and children living there by giving them training courses in 2017-2018 in creative writing, drawing, and how to enjoy reading books. PBBY arranged with two persons who have Jerusalem identity cards to train the children in drawing and in creative writing. The course in creative writing was implemented by Maya Abu al-Hayyat for two groups: first, for the training of the coordinators of the center, and second, for the children. Most of the children were happy to write stories reflecting their reality. Their stories were spontaneous and reflected their aspiration to have their voice reach the wider world. The second stage involved sending the Jerusalem stories to PBBY libraries in Gaza where the children interacted with the text and made beautiful illustrations for them. Unfortunately, the course in drawing was not held, due to the various difficulties in Jerusalem. PBBY hopes to continue such work in Jerusalem when the situation permits and when funds become available.

## Conclusion

Finally, IBBY/Palestine would like to extend its warmest thanks and appreciation for all those who sent us letters and messages of solidarity and concerns during the difficult situations in Gaza. Also, we want to acknowledge, with thanks, all the following for their financial and moral support during these 15 years, for without their help, the Palestine Section would not have been able to establish and maintain the libraries in Gaza and promote the pleasure of reading for the Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: IBBY's Children in Crisis Fund, IBBY's Appeal Funds in 2014 and 2017, USA/IBBY National Section, United Palestine Appeal (UPA), UAE/Sharjah Fund, Katherine Paterson Family Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Al-Saraya Center for Community Services, see the organization's website: <http://alsaraya-center.org/index.php>.

Fund, Family of Marianne de Doncker Fund, the Royalties of the book *If I Were a Bird* written by Fatima Sharafeddin, Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ma'an Development Center, Qattan Foundation, Kalimat Publishing House, Al-Nasher Publishing House, and Anne Carter.

Institutions, societies, and individuals who believe in helping children to develop skills of reading and writing can donate money to Ma'an Development Center in Ramallah, Palestine which, thankfully, takes care of PBBY's financial account.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>To donate to IBBY Palestine, please visit the "Contact us" page of the Ma'an Development Center: <https://www.maan-ctr.org/en/article/51/Contact-Us>.

## Article by a Gaza Librarian

### Al-Shawka Library/Rafah

It was a beautiful dream in everyone's mind: a library for children, adolescents, and the residents of the marginalized and cut-off al-Shawka neighborhood that, from time to time, is exposed to Zionist invasions. With no place to shelter them, they played most of their games on the roads, which were also their shelter and source of income (agriculture).

**2007:** Unfortunately, two local children faced their death while playing on these roads where traces of explosives can be found. After a long wait and effort, the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) lent a helping hand to the people of al-Shawka and established a small library that housed a small but beautiful collection of books and a few shelves, and that had a great impact on the children. But this joyful occasion didn't last; that same year, the occupation carried out a large sweep of the neighborhood. The library, which was but a small room in a building, was not spared the arrogance of the occupation, which broke the shelves, tore the books, smashed the computer, and confiscated its hard drive. The dream was lost, along with all hope because the people didn't have the means to re-establish the library.

But hope returned with vigor, stronger and larger than before, when the Board extended a helping hand to the people and children of the region and re-established the library. The children returned to engage with their peers united by library activities.

**2008:** A new war struck the region, killing nearly eight children who used the library.

The occupation used the library as its fortress, which led to the library's destruction again and again. IBBY funded the renovation of the library and provided a new set of shelves and books.

**2012:** During this year, the library building was damaged during a new war on the Strip. Again, the Board expanded the library and provided additional books. Its generous funding continues indefinitely.

**2014:** A new war strikes the roofs of homes and the hearts of children. War returns to terrorize everyone and kill joy. In this fifty-one-day war, the occupation used the library and its playground as a fortress

and military barracks. Israeli warplanes bombed a group of houses and places in the neighborhood, erasing any sense of safety from the hearts of children and parents. But IBBY accompanied us throughout the duration, moment by moment, and gave much aid that, through the rebuilding of the library's small playground, helped to paint a smile on the children's faces.

**2015 to present:** IBBY continues to fund al-Shawka library and its children.

## **Testimony of al-Ataa' Librarian: Is It My Fault That I Am a Palestinian?**

Days of Horror:  
Testimony of the Librarian Abla Hamad

by Abla Ismail Hamad (Hamad, 2014)<sup>3</sup>

On July 21, 2014 on the 23rd Day of Ramadan at 8:00 a.m. my older sister, who came to live in my parent's home after the shells destroyed her house, called to tell me to prepare my things to move to Jabalia because the situation in Beit Hanoun is getting worse day by day. Most of the residents of the area are escaping from the heavy shelling on their homes.

I was hesitant but the situation and the sound of shells is getting closer which forced me to agree. I prepared a few clothes for my child. My husband got the important official documents. We got in the car and were surprised that my brothers and father refused to leave saying that should there be an emergency it would be easier for them to leave without women and children.

We got to an apartment in Jabalia that belongs to our relatives. On arrival, we found out that many families have arrived there before us escaping from death and destruction. All of us sat in a small room until the afternoon telling each other what happened to us. Everyone was also contacting people who remained in Beit Hanoun to inquire about their safety. The occupation forces continued targeting every place that had people still there. Meanwhile, my older brother called asking if there was room for him and his family. Although there was no space, we said yes. In half an hour they arrived. They began telling us about the difficult situation. The occupation forces were brutal with their tanks, planes, missiles and rockets targeting every stone, tree and human beings. They miraculously escaped death.

It was impossible for all the displaced, and relatives to stay together in the same small place. There was no furniture, nor bedding ... Therefore, we decided that some of us should leave including my family,

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<sup>3</sup> Please note: the translation of "Testimony of al-Ataa' Librarian" published here differs in some respects from the translation of Hamad, 2014 on the IBBY Palestine website.

my sister, her husband and four children. We left, walking to a vacant place belonging to a friend of my brother-in-law in the Gaza area. We walked a long distance before we found a car. We arrived at the place one hour before *Iftar* [the call to prayer for breaking the fast at sunset]. We found the place without anything in it, and in addition, we were fasting. But these things were not a problem. The problem was that the occupation forces shelled a building close to us, and my child was wounded in his forehead. My husband carried him to al-Shifa' Hospital while my brother-in-law went to buy water and bread for *Iftar*.

Since there was no other place to live in, we had to buy the basics of furniture so we could live in dignity despite the difficult financial situation. We spent many difficult days hearing explosions and sad news. Sometimes, we heard about a martyred person whom we knew and loved; other times, about the destruction of homes of relatives and friends; and sometimes about the bombing of mosques.

But the most difficult moment was when I heard that the occupation forces targeted a place dear to my heart near my home, al-Ataa' Society and the library where I worked, which had embraced me and many groups and children. I lost hope that people would find safety. On one day of Ramadan there was a humanitarian truce between the two sides. My husband and other relatives went to fetch some clothes for my child and other necessary items from our homes. They found out that Beit Hanoun had become a completely destroyed area with dead bodies under the rubble of their homes, and dozens of martyrs. The situation was so tragic that many people broke their fast from the severity of the disaster and shock. When the people returned safely, we could see in their eyes the magnitude of the tragedy. Men cried for their trees, stones, homes, infrastructure, animals, and birds that were not saved. After a difficult period of displacement, my second shock came when I heard reports of the total destruction of my home by a vicious F-16 Zionist aircraft that smashed the walls and furniture but could not erase the will of life.

As soon as we heard that the last truce was in effect, we gathered all our things and set out at night to Beit Hanoun. I saw the destruction of hundreds of houses in my small city. I saw in the rubble of my house the extent of Zionist hatred of the Palestinian presence. The occupation prevented us from living in our houses and deprived our young children from playing with their toys and sleeping in their own beds. I spent those days in grief, challenged, but regaining strength and doing acts of charity. Has the Gaza Strip ever before spent a month like this month of Ramadan or a feast day like this? No.

I am proud to be a Palestinian and I love Palestine.



## Article by a Gaza Librarian Al-Sikka Library/Beit Hanoun

Al-Ataa' Charitable Organization is concerned with the existence of a children's library because the library is a chief pillar for building refined minds. The organization's library occupied the first floor of its building (approximately 40 meters square, or 430 square feet) in Zytoon street in Beit Hanoun. In 2008, it contained 5,996 books, from children's stories, adolescent literature, as well as general books and reference materials. These books were provided by IBBY, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and Tamer Institute for Community Education. The library served all categories of the community and offered numerous programs and activities aimed at developing the capabilities of its users, and supporting their educational, cultural, psychological and social character.

**2008:** Israeli forces demolish and flatten a large part of the building.

**2014:** The Israeli occupation forces completely shell the building.

**2015:** IBBY re-equips the library and furnishes it with a collection of books for children and adolescents.

Now, the library contains 1,220 books. IBBY continues to follow the work of the Library and its activities and to provide it with the books it needs.

## A collection of drawings by Gaza children depicting Israeli aggression on Gaza 2008-9

(IBBY Palestine, n.d.)



Figure 1: Gaza Abandoned - A man abandons the war ridden Gaza, carrying a sack on his back, marked with the UN logo and an olive branch, possibly representing peace or the United Nations itself.



Figure 2: We Won't Kneel Even If Only One of Us Is Left - the phrase is written on the ground under a child shielding bullets from two Israeli soldiers.

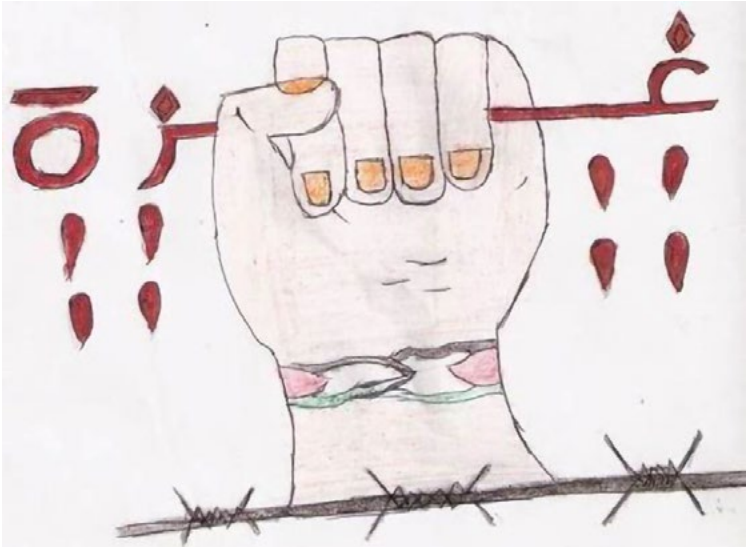


Figure 3: Gaza Bleeds - The word Gaza is written with blood dripping from it.



Figure 4: Gaza in the Belly of the Snake - Gaza is surrounded by a snake representing the occupation.



Figure 5: Cities Under Israeli Watch - The eggs have city names (Jerusalem, Jaffa, Dar el-Rafah, etc.), watched by a bird representing Israel.



Figure 6: May God Answer with Victory - The phrase "May God Answer" written next to a man praying towards a mosque, representing a soldier, with the sign of victory raised over city ruins.



Figure 7: Gaza on Fire – The word Gaza is consumed with fire.



Figure 8: Before and After War – The right half of the drawing is a scene of happy/peaceful life, with “before war” written above a smiling youth. The left, in contrast, represents current life under occupation and the phrase “after war” is written in the ruins below the youth.

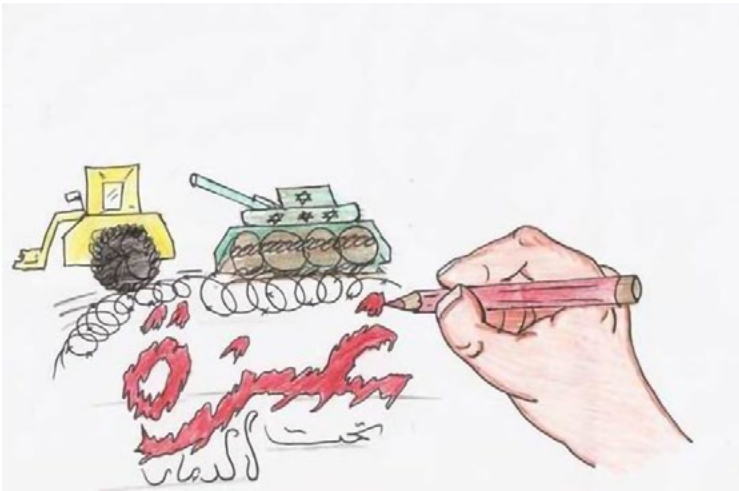


Figure 9: Gaza Under Demolition - The phrase written under army tanks.

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