

## Editorial

**But not Jerusalem!**

We awake terrified by many nightmares as if someone is attempting to peel away our soul. We dither about taking decisions for fear that the most evil of them want to snatch Jerusalem from us; Jerusalem is the city that half of the world's population yearns to visit. Over the centuries, allies of oppression and tyranny have subjected Jerusalem to destruction on two occasions, to siege 23 times, assaulted it 52 times, and invaded its walls 44 times. There is no difference between them as there is no difference between one enemy and another as long as their intention is the same - to snatch Jerusalem. In spite of the malicious intentions and our intense fear, we find a pillar of reassurance and peace in 'There is no God but Allah'. We are reassured that Jerusalem will not leave us because it is ours. This is engraved on our foreheads, on the coffins of martyrs, on the sea when it rages, on the rocks when they quake, above the thudding sounds, above the achievement of a dream, in the Quran and in the Bible. It is ours, it is ours; it has always been the case and will remain so.

AL HAL - Wednesday 4/1/2018

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**Provisional borders and Jerusalem not part of the solution****The US plan: A state in the Gaza Strip and half of the West Bank**
 **Mohammad Yunis**

Western diplomatic sources have revealed that the US administration is preparing to put forward a peace plan that includes the establishment of a Palestinian state with interim borders in the Gaza Strip and half of the West Bank. This follows the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the exclusion of Jerusalem from a proposed political solution.

The sources said that the American team had prepared a plan for a political solution that they intend to propose within a regional context with the involvement of several key Arab countries.

A senior Western diplomat told al-Hal that this is essentially an economic plan based on raising \$10 billion from donor countries to establish a Palestinian state on half the area of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip, and with the issues of borders and refugees deferred to subsequent negotiations.

The diplomat added: "The American delegates, Jared Kushner, Jason Greenblatt and Ambassador David Friedman, held dozens of meetings with Palestinians and Israelis and came to the conclusion that the only possible solution at this stage is a state with interim borders. The team concluded that any other solution would fail because the stronger side, namely Israel, would reject it."

He also said that Israel informed the three American officials that it could not grant the Palestinians a whole state at this stage, only a state on half of the West Bank, or perhaps a bit more, and would continue to control the borders and airspace pending a permanent solution in negotiations later.

The diplomat, who is close to these contacts, said that the Americans recognize that this solution is not acceptable to Palestinians. They are therefore trying to tempt Palestinians by declaring this to be an interim solution, and providing large sums of money to establish a Palestinian state and a port and airport, plus housing, tourist and agricultural projects that will offer employment opportunities for unemployed workers in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

For the Americans, the first requirement of this solution starts with the Palestinian Authority regaining power in the Gaza Strip, which will be the center of the state.

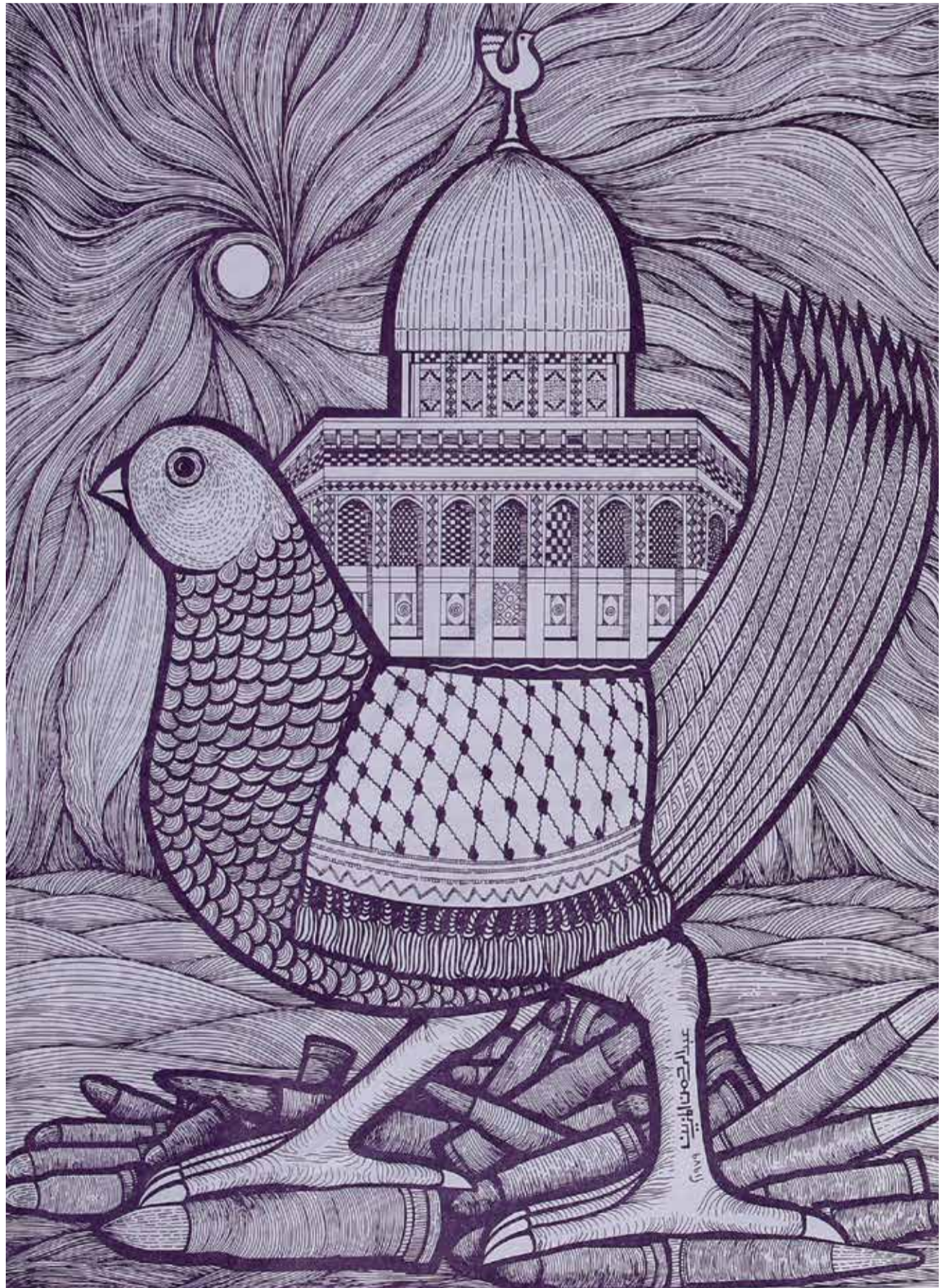
This solution will be proposed as part of an international and regional plan involving Arab countries and the international community, and will bring about the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab world.

Palestinian officials said that the proposed political solution would be unacceptable to any Palestinian unless as part of a detailed and phased peace agreement that includes Jerusalem. It is anticipated that the Americans will announce the plan early in 2018.

A number of Palestinian officials confirmed that this American plan exists. According to a senior official, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman discussed its details with President Mahmoud Abbas and tried to reassure Abbas that he would be 'satisfied'. The Palestinian official added that: "Saudi interests in the so-called regional solution are far from those of Palestinians."

"It seems that what is being proposed now is much less than that offered to us in the past and much more dangerous than what was presented previously. This ends the Palestinian cause by granting us a mini-state on half of the West Bank; no Palestinian will agree to this."

He continued: "This is a plan by Netanyahu and Kushner to eradicate the Palestinian cause, but this time by mobilizing Arabs. We are confident that Saudi Arabia will eventually back us rather than sell out our cause."



NO PEACE WITHOUT JERUSALEM



لاسلام بدون القدس



## An interview with al-Hal newspaper

# Al-Qudwa: Israel's failure to recognize the two-state solution does not negate the existence of the State of Palestine

## National unity is a condition for achieving independence and there are no disagreements on political grounds within Fatah

**Interviewed by Jihad al-Qaq**

Fatah Central Committee member and Chairman of the Yasser Arafat Foundation, Dr. Naser al-Qudwa, stressed that Israel's failure to recognize the two-state solution does not negate the existence of the State of Palestine. He emphasized the need to restore geographical and political national unity as a fundamental part of the plan for national independence in a Palestinian state on 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital.

This interview was conducted at Qudwa's office in Ramallah for al-Hal newspaper. Al-Qudwa said that there are no internal differences within Fatah on political grounds. He stressed that there have been considerable improvements in the Fatah media, which must differ from official media in form and content.

The following is the interview:

**Many are talking about American and Arab pressure to accept the deal of the century. What are our options as Palestinians to accept or reject the deal?**

Actually, there is no such thing as the deal of the century. There are only US assurances of an initiative and proposals to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and change the status quo in the whole region. We do not know clearly what these proposals consist of. Israeli leaks aim to put facts on the ground, such as the rumors about settlements, borders, Jerusalem, and other issues. We want greater participation in drafting these proposals before they are presented. We will then deal with the proposals regardless of their origin, but nothing that impinges on Palestinian national interests can be accepted.

**When we think outside the framework of the two-state solution, what alternative options exist in the Palestinian political program?**

I believe that it is wrong to say that the Palestinian program is about a two-state solution; it is about the struggle for national independence for the State of Palestine on 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. This is the program of national consensus to which we must adhere. By virtue of the historic and natural rights of the Palestinian people, international law, the position of the United Nations and global recognition of the Declaration of Independence in 1988, the State of Palestine exists. We are not negotiating with Israel on this topic since no one grants us a state. We are negotiating the borders of the state and the relationship between the two states. The two-state solution is a formula for political settlement put forward by the international

community that we are ready to welcome and advance with, but if Israel hampers this process, this does not negate the existence of the Palestinian state and the national rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, if we do not obtain our rights through a settlement, we will continue the struggle for our national rights and state independence.

**What Palestinian political priorities can be agreed upon in light of these huge pressures on the Palestinian leadership, especially American pressure?**

Basically, nothing has been proposed and we have not witnessed any pressure. Even the comments about the closure of the PLO office in Washington D.C. represent an old problem and are not new. The US Congress enacted legislation that is hostile to the Palestinian people and the PLO, thereby impeding us from conducting any normal work. The essence of the problem lies in the position of the Congress and the laws adopted. We will not accept such a negative act as closing the PLO office in Washington without a counter reaction on our part.

Political priorities must be a national priority. We have two main issues to deal with in the Palestinian arena: one is to restore geographical and political unity to create a coherent Palestinian arena; the other is to oppose colonialism as a war crime and a grave violation of international law. Our opposition is manifested through raising awareness of resistance against settlements and settlers by abstaining from work in settlements, boycotting Israeli products, defending our land, acting seriously, and using the full potential of the Palestinian people. Then we can start to build regional and international penal measures against settlements consistent with international and humanitarian law. But we need to perform our duty in the first place.

**In light of growing discussion about Israeli relations with Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, are we talking about relationships that take into consideration the Palestinian cause or individual relationships like those between Egypt and Israel in Camp David?**

The importance of the Arab dimension in the Palestinian struggle must be highlighted. The Arab region is the fundamental leverage of this struggle and the authentic source of support for us. Unfortunately, the Arab region has experienced, and is still undergoing, great problems that have weakened and perhaps even destroyed some of these countries. Nevertheless, this does not negate their strategic importance to us.



Israelis try to promote a ridiculous idea that the normalization of relations with Arab countries is required to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at a later stage. We realize that some Arab countries have contact with Israel, albeit under cover, but it is impossible for these relations to turn into political ones unless the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is resolved first. Israeli lies claiming that there is an alternative to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts are false and there is no way to transcend the Palestinian issue as the essence of the conflict.

**How do you assess Palestinian diplomacy? Where did it achieve success and where did it fail? What needs to be done in the coming period?**

Palestinian relationships, whether with the Arabs or internationally, do not depend solely on diplomatic efforts. They are linked to the essence of the Palestinian political position and developments in the conflict much more than to the concept of diplomacy in the traditional meaning of the word.

There have been some achievements in the conflict with Israel, whether on the ground or abroad. But there have also been some setbacks, including the voting model in the United Nations since 1988 which recently became a matter of concern that needs to be handled with diplomacy. There have been pros and cons but our just cause remains a high priority for many in the Arab region and the world, and we must move forward with determination towards achieving our just goals.

**In your opinion, is internal reconciliation needed to end the differences within the Fatah movement and is there any**

**prospect for reconciliation? Have these differences affected the Palestinian political state as a whole, especially foreign policy?**

I do not think that internal problems exist within the Fatah movement as a result of political disputes or stances. Efforts to improve internal conditions usually address political disputes. However, organizational offenses related to external communication and links must be handled differently and not through reconciliation.

**Do you believe that the media of the Fatah movement has emerged from under the cover of the Palestinian Authority or not? What developments have taken place in this regard after you assumed your responsibility as commissioner for Fatah culture and media?**

The Fatah media is that of a political organization and must differ from official media in form and content. It must be popular and close to people, generally reflecting the Fatah national will more frankly than the official media.

We are working to develop the Fatah media, starting with resources such as electronic devices. The website has been designed to enable access by smart phones. Soon, there will be a special application that allows for direct contact with everyone using the application. We have also established a newsroom and are embarking on a project to improve the studios and equipment of Radio Mawtini. Whoever looks at our news site will notice a clear improvement.

*Jihad al-Qaq is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.*



Despite diminishing numbers, they dream of stability returning to the Gaza Strip

## Gaza's Christians: We look for anything that reminds us of the glory of Christmas



*Imperfect joy for Christmas in Gaza.*

**Samar Dreimli**

Despite their diminishing numbers, Christians are dreaming of a return to peace and stability in the Gaza Strip as they prepare their houses and churches to celebrate Christmas. Their actions indicate that they are looking for anything that reminds them of the festival.

We interviewed Christians who were in a shop selling sweets and Christmas decorations in the centre of Gaza city.

The head of the public relations office at the Orthodox Church, Kamel Ayyad, said: "Some of us try to celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem. We obtain 600 of the 800 or 900 permits applied for from the Israeli occupation via the Palestinian Liaison Office to travel from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank."

He continued that it is rare for the Israeli authorities to issue permits for the whole family; they reject the application of the father, mother or one of the children without specifying a reason or declaring 'rejected for security reasons' or 'limited number'.

Ayyad explained that prior to Palestinian divisions, "we used to celebrate much more with parades by Orthodox scouts and lighting the Christmas tree in the Square of the Unknown Soldier in Gaza city in the presence of Gaza's governor. We used to decorate streets and young men and women would dress as Santa Claus to tour the streets and spread joy and pleasure. We also used to visit the sick in hospitals with bouquets of flowers in an attempt to bring them joy."

Ayyad stated that now they merely open the gates of the church following the festive prayers to receive well-wishers from national and Islamic movements who come to visit

Bishop Alexios and various dignitaries of the Christian community in Gaza.

Ayyad said: "We hope that Palestinian reconciliation will be concluded as eleven continuous years of division, siege, and poverty are enough, in addition to the disruptions and deterioration of all aspects of life, especially electricity and water, and three extremely difficult wars that left every house with a martyr or a wounded family member."

Ayyad called upon President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and the Palestinian leadership to come and celebrate Christmas with Gaza's Christians, and expressed his hopes for a new year of tolerance and Palestinian unity.

"Christians are not the only ones who feel scared and lack feelings of security. All Palestinians, even in the West Bank, are affected by the Israeli occupation. However, the number of Christians in the Gaza Strip is clearly decreasing and the departure or migration of a few of us affects the already small number in our community, whereas the rest of the population exceeds 2 million and the migration of one or two thousand does not affect numbers."

The Project Director at the Church of the Holy Family, Nisreen Antone, agrees with Ayyad that the numbers of Christians in the Gaza Strip is falling yearly, especially following the last Israeli aggression in 2014 and the constant fear of fresh aggression at any time. She added: "What scares us more than the division between Fatah and Hamas is the possibility of Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip at any time. Many Christian families have left Gaza to settle in the West Bank and elsewhere, even without any livelihood there. All they are seeking is a sense of security and

peace."

She said: "We already feel our numbers declining. Even during mass, entire families are missing."

Nisreen explained that preparations have been in place since early December for the reception of the Patriarch of Jerusalem at the Holy Family Church in Gaza, where a large Christmas tree is decorated and a cave similar to that at the Church of Nativity is set up. Scouts and artists are trained for theater performances and preparations are made to receive worshipers who come to the Church on the night of December 24 for prayers and hymns."

In the vicinity of the Church, there is an elderly home that also cares for children with mental disabilities and special needs. Nuns provide round-the-clock care to these elderly people and children, all of them Muslim.

According to the Eastern calendar, Catholic Christians celebrate Christmas for two days starting on the 7th of December every year; while in the Western calendar, Catholic Christians start their celebration on the 25th of December.

Dr Issa Tarazi, executive director of the Near East Council of Churches in Gaza, stressed that religious ceremonies at Christmas are no different today than in the period prior to the Palestinian division except that the people are not as happy and joyful. "Therefore, we hope that the division ends and all Palestinians are united for their best interests so that peace and stability may prevail in the region and the world at large."

Haya Tarazi, a young Christian woman who was able to spend last year's festival in Bethlehem when she was granted a permit by the Israeli

authorities to enter the West Bank, but not for her parents, said: "The joy of Christmas in Gaza is quite different than in Bethlehem, especially in the streets. In Gaza I can only feel the festival inside the Church when I see the decorations and hear the hymns."

She added: "When I look in the Gaza Strip markets to buy sweets that bring joy to our hearts and homes at Christmas time, I do not find any due to the siege and persistent closure of borders. This adds to the dullness of our festival in Gaza."

According to historian and researcher Salim al-Mubayed, the Christian presence in the Gaza Strip dates back to the fifth century AD. He pointed out that the number of Christians was 5000 but has declined to about 1000.

Al-Mubayed confirmed that Christianity flourished in the Gaza Strip at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries AD. It spread beyond Gaza city and the ports towards areas along the coast where churches, monasteries, and shrines were built.

Eastern sect Christians in the Gaza Strip perform their rituals in the Orthodox Church or in the Church of Saint Porphyrius, which is located in the heart of Gaza city and in the middle of a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. It is attached to the Kateb Welayat Mosque by a common wall that dates to the beginning of the fifth century AD. It holds the grave of Saint Porphyrius who died in 420 AD and the oldest mural of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ.

Christians from the Western sect perform their rituals at the Holy Family Church, one of the oldest churches in the Gaza Strip located in the old part of Gaza city.





## Al-Dahria Martyrs School for Girls heads to the World Robotics Olympiad

**Lina Mteir**

The 7th of October was an unusual day at Al-Dahria Martyrs School for Girls. The announcement that the school had qualified for the final stage of the World Robotics Olympiad (WRO) contest was unexpected as it was the first experience of its kind for the girls in the world of robotics and programming.

The contest will take place in Costa Rica, where competitors will program and set up robots. This will develop the skills of young people in design, programming, and problem-solving. The contest comprises three categories: regular, football, and junior contests.

**Support criteria**

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education engaged in this competition in the belief that Palestine is advancing in the development of techniques and resources to advance students' lives through education and skills.

Engineer and technology supervisor at the Southern Hebron Directorate, Sami Ghannam, said: "Our goal was to arrange administrative matters and provide psychological and financial support, plus education, for students in courses and workshops supervised by specialist engineers who teach participants programming and robotics science."

Ghannam explained that the participating schools were selected according to several criteria, mainly the reputation of the school and its participation in educational activities and initiatives.

An enjoyable but demanding experience Al-Dahria Martyrs School participated in this contest at junior level, competing with several Palestinian schools, five of which are in southern Hebron. The information and technology teacher and contest supervisor, Diala Abu Allan, explained: "In this category, the host country chooses a problem it faces in the tourism sector to be resolved using robotics. Our mission was to work on a project to utilize solar energy using robotics and Lego. A robot was programmed to carry the Lego pieces that represented solar sheets and trees in solar fields. The team had to finish this task in two hours without any errors."

Students Batoul Shehdeh and Narmin Alwaysa related their experience, the first of its kind, and described it as enjoyable but exhausting. It was their first attempt at programming. "The subject is new for us and we had never worked on it before, so it is not easy to learn this in one month," according to Narmin.

The courses they were given were insufficient and they turned to YouTube to learn more. Shehdeh stated that YouTube helped in solving the problems they faced: "For each problem we faced, there was a solution on YouTube."

They practiced at school on a daily basis from the beginning of the day until 6 pm. They increased their working hours as the day of the contest drew closer. Alwaysa said: "We were overwhelmed with stress on the day before the deadline. We stayed at school for long hours but could not finish the



The robot of Al-Dahria Girls School in one of the competitions.

project. We had to finish the work the next day on public transport. Those were crazy moments. The most unforgettable moments were once the competition started. We had two hours to accomplish the task but we finished in a quarter of an hour, to the surprise of the engineers at our speedy and skillful performance. Thus, the triumph was ours."

**Obstacles were no barrier**

Ten years ago, Al-Dahria Martyrs School for Girls had a modest building and weak infrastructure. Today, it is achieving great success. The school principal Amira Dayyeh said: "We were able to improve and develop the school, and have had many educational achievements by winning competitions and participating in activities and initiatives. For

these reasons, the Ministry of Education selected our school for this contest and here we are: we won and qualified for world competitions."

The main challenge faced by the group was the lack of equipment and its high cost. Dayyeh said: "The sensors used in installing robots cost us about NIS1000, but the local community contributed to the cost." Ghannam pointed out that the municipality provided funding to their schools to purchase the necessary equipment.

Supervisor Diala Abu Allan said: "We worked on this project for only one month while other schools started training their students three years ago. Delays of equipment imported from abroad also complicated matters."

## Five talented musicians in one family...and the father is an artist

**Areen Barakat**

At the *Edward Said* National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem, an unusual Jerusalem family plays both Eastern and Western music: the five children of one household play rhythms and tunes that complement each other on different musical instruments.

The children of Ali Abu Ali play a variety of musical tunes that blend together to create a unique rhythm by five talented siblings under one roof.

To tell the story of this family, al-Hal visited their house and interviewed the children and their father.

Ten-year-old Saad Abu Ali said that he started playing al-Qanoun (the zither) a couple of years ago when his dad chose this musical instrument for him at a young age. Initially Saad had difficulties playing the instrument, but once he learned how to play it, he loved it, especially playing the song Tic Tic Tic Ya Um Suleiman. He said that he differs from his peers at school because they have different interests: he is interested in playing music while they are interested in soccer and swimming and do not care about music.

Aws Abu Ali (11 years) said that he started playing al-Nai (the flute) three years ago. He admired how his teacher played the flute and wanted to learn this instrument

because it is distinctive and few people play it. He had difficulties learning at the beginning but in time the flute became part of his life. He works hard to teach himself by listening to pieces on YouTube and by playing alone in his free time.

Fifteen-year-old Qais Abu Ali explained that the idea of playing a musical instrument started when he and his brothers registered one summer at the *Edward Said* National Conservatory of Music. Here they were introduced to all instruments to enable them to choose one. He chose the Oud and has been playing for three years now because he loves Eastern music. He stated that he is learning to play the Oud as a hobby; he does not want to be a professional musician as he wants to study medicine in college. However he still needs to be proficient in playing music because he likes to participate in musical festivals.

Zaid Abu Ali (17 years of age) chose to play the saxophone three years ago. He got to know his instrument by learning different musical pieces with tones that he loved. He plays music as a hobby and may become professional, although his ambition is to become a mechanical engineer. Zaid said that the nicest thing is that he and his brothers practice what they learn together. His musical instrument is the most precious thing he owns and he always handles it

with care as he juggles his time between his hobby and his studies.

Fourteen-year-old Omar Abu Ali described his great passion for playing the drums because it is different from the instruments his brothers play. He can use both his hands and feet with movements that distinguish it from all other instruments, as well as being able to play Eastern and Western music. He started playing the drums almost a year and a half ago.

Omar concluded his interview with al-Hal by saying: "Besides playing music, I play basketball. Although I find it difficult to fit in studying with my hobby, especially during exam periods, I cannot abandon my hobby of playing music. The Conservatory and music have become an essential part of my life that I can never give up."

The father, Ali Abu Ali, told al-Hal that he had never imagined that his children would have such interest in music, although he sensed it when he enrolled them in the *Edward Said* National Conservatory of Music and allowed them to choose the musical instrument they preferred. The children are a source of pride for him for their talent and ability to play music. There is the possibility that these hobbies could become important. The father loves to develop hobbies as he paints pottery and teaches this to his sons to make use of their leisure time. He said

that he and the children's mother are very happy to have a family of musicians.

The father explained that he has a purpose and message in spite of material difficulties. He believes that music may open doors for the children in the future and he sees himself in them. Studies are important, but the father believes that learning music and other hobbies complement study. His goal is that the children will sustain their activities in this area to exert a positive influence on their community.

Abu Ali said that half his sons play Western instruments and the other half play Eastern instruments. He sees his responsibility as encouraging them to excel and to embrace a spirit of volunteering, which is essential to help the community.

He described his sons as outstanding among their peers; he is satisfied with what they have achieved and will continue to support them in their talents. Aws had made great improvement in playing his instrument, and Omar is doing well although he only enrolled recently in the Conservatory. Abu Ali stressed that he helps his sons to develop themselves, fit into their society, and become successful and active individuals.

*Areen Barakat is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.*