

Emergency in Gaza and Bethlehem – Support for the disabled in the Palestinian Territories

A project to accommodate seriously physically and mentally disabled children and adolescents in Bethlehem and Gaza.

The context

The Gaza strip is around 40km in length and 10km in width. This coastal area of land is home to around 1.5 million Arab Palestinians, of which around half are minors. Around two thirds of the population are refugees, forced to abandon their homes following the wars of 1948 and 1967 and move to one of the 8 refugee camps now found on the Gaza strip. The high population density coupled with the difficulties following the recent embargo imposed as a security measure by Israel has made the Gaza Strip one of the most troubled areas in the Middle East. Most of the population survives on less than two dollars a day and around 80% depend on humanitarian aid provided by international organizations and other NGO's.



The population and specifically the children suffer from extreme hardship due to the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel in Gaza, the coming to power of Hamas, the operation "Cast Lead" that saw innumerable casualties, over 1,300 fatalities and sheer unfathomable destruction in early 2009, the worsening of the violence after the operation "Pillar of clouds" carried out in november 2012, as well as the Israeli blockade in general in Gaza.

The Christian Community

Gaza's Christian community dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. The city was converted to Christianity by Saint Porphyre who is noted as the first bishop of Gaza and creator of several monastic communities, the ruins of whose churches and monasteries, enriched with beautiful Byzantine mosaics,

are still visited today. At present, the Parish has 250 Catholic members.

Beneath the lively and welcoming community of Gaza lies many problems and deep concerns. Members of the Arabic Christian community encounter many difficulties concerning both the Islamic majority in the area and the Israeli conflict. Palestinians suffer as do all people in the area from employment problems and from the Israeli blockade. Israeli Christians are often regarded as openly supporting the West and as such they are excluded from the Muslim majority.

Due to the heavy Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, the economy is at a standstill and unemployment levels and poverty are at an all time high. There is a lack of food, clean water, healthcare, as well as an abundance of hunger and disease. Scars of recent wars remain ever present; fear, loss of loved ones, injuries, demolished homes and harrowing experiences that still remain in this part of the Holy Land.

Normal people are suffering greatly due to the fact that they have been forgotten. They feel as though they are no longer regarded as normal people, free to pursue their own futures and that of their children, but as the guilty party of a system governed by Islamic extremists.

The project

In Palestine, from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, there is no support in place for children with learning difficulties or for families with disabled children.

In the traditional mindset, disability is still seen as a form of divine punishment and brings shame on the family. It is particularly a problem for females, who struggle to marry and are therefore cast out of society.

Many families choose to isolate disabled family members, not allowing them to leave the house.

This is a very common problem in the independent Palestinian territories, made worse by the complete lack of training programs and facilities for dealing more difficult cases.



www.proterrasancta.org

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Until today, little to nothing has been done to change the attitude that exists. We must create the facilities and implement training programs regarding the care and the respect of disabled people.

The objectives

Project 'Gaza Emergency' supports to two facilities recently founded on the Gaza Strip, offering training and education regarding respecting and taking care of disabled people in Palestinian society.

The first facility, run by the Missionary Sisters of Charity, takes care of disabled children aged from 0-11 years old. The second facility targets adolescents, and is run by the Fathers of the Community of the Incarnate Word.

The training program will be run by local and international experts, in collaboration with Palestinian universities and Italian universities specializing in this kind of teaching.

Specific objectives

1. Providing necessary equipment and support for the infrastructure of the two Christian facilities.
2. Carrying out a training program on disability focused on four separate modules: prevention of stuttering, movement, autism and learning difficulties.



Activities

The Facilities:

- Restructuring and adaptation of health services for the disabled;
- Making the facilities accessible for disabled people using ramps etc;
- Refurnishing the bedrooms adapting them to the needs of disabled people;
- Purchase of necessary medical equipment;
- Emergency recovery in cases of abandonment

Training and Awareness:

- Four training programs of one week will be held in Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin and Ramallah with video links to the University College of Applied Sciences in Gaza. Upon completion, the video and teaching material will be published.

To find out more: www.proterrasancta.org

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Association pro Terra Sancta is the not-for-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) of the Custody of the Holy Land, the Franciscan province in the south-eastern Mediterranean.

Association pro Terra Sancta serves the tasks and projects of the Custody of the Holy Land. Its areas of activity include promotional initiatives, fundraising, public relations, project management, evaluation and accounting.

The charity is active in those countries where the Custody is represented, namely Israel, the Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus and Rhodes.

Association pro Terra Sancta also gives you the opportunity to participate in this work.

Donations to the charity of the Custody of the Holy Land are received directly by those projects that need them the most. Reliability and very low administrative costs are guaranteed.

Association pro Terra Sancta was originated by the Custody of the Holy Land. The charity's underlying values trace their roots to the spirituality of the Franciscan order and the history of the Custody.



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