

# News from Interpal

Helping Palestinians in need



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## **1. Nakba Appeal Week**

During the week beginning 12 May, Interpal ran several activities to commemorate the Nakba and raise funds for Palestinians in need. Charity dinners were held in Manchester and Birmingham, and a collaboration with the Islam channel produced a week of special programmes about the Nakba, Palestine and the Palestinian humanitarian situation. This series culminated in a live TV appeal, which was anchored by Ibrahim Hewitt, Interpal's Chairman, and Dahlia Maahrouf, Interpal's PR and Advocacy Officer, alongside a special guest presenter. Overall, Nakba week fundraising efforts raised more than £50,000 towards Interpal's projects in Palestine.

## **2. Trustees meeting**

Interpal's Board of Trustees held its second meeting of the year on Saturday 17 May. They reviewed and approved the draft accounts for the last financial year, and considered and approved a number of special projects for the refugee camps in Lebanon amounting to £100,000.

## **3. PPDP Workshop**

The first meeting of Partners for Peace and Development for Palestinians (PPDP) was held on 12 May in London, chaired by Dr As'ad Abdul Rahman of the Palestinian International Institute (PII). This initial gathering took the form of a workshop, where ideas and suggestions for the future of PPDP could be discussed, with the emphasis on humanitarian issues. In attendance were Nilly Abuarqub of the Palestinian Red Crescent and Dimitri Diliiani of the Consortium of Jerusalem Institutions, both based in Palestine, as well as UK-based representatives from Interpal, the Welfare Association, Zaytoun, Muslim Aid, Muslim Hands, the Palestine Trauma Centre at the University of Herts and Dr Husam Zomlot, from the Palestinian Delegation to the UK (who attended the working lunch session).

The participants shared their experience of working on Palestinian issues, discussing common challenges and looking at ways of combining their efforts. Ibrahim Hewitt of Interpal made a welcoming address before Dr As'ad brought the focus onto a humanitarian approach to the situation in Gaza. The workshop heard examples of the work of the Palestinian Red Crescent, Welfare Association and the Consortium of Jerusalem Institutions, which already co-ordinates the efforts of 27 organisations in the region. The existing structure of the Palestine Platform was also discussed.

Dr As'ad suggested that the current work towards establishing the humanitarian aspects of the wider PPDP should be brought together into a **co-ordinating committee**. Its ultimate focus should be non-political – with its overall emphasis on co-ordination and communications.

The co-ordinating committee members should only involve NGOs driven by the needs of Palestinians, not government organisations. It was suggested that the initial members could consist of PII, the Palestinian Red Crescent, the Consortium of Jerusalem Institutions, Interpal, Muslim Aid, and from Europe, Rights for All (Geneva), Innocence (Norway) and PPMS (The Netherlands). The Welfare Association was invited to join the Committee, but said they would respond to the offer after consultation with their headquarters.

The establishment of other areas of PPDP to involve lawyers, politicians and the newsmedia are now under consideration.

#### **4. Traumatic times for Palestine's children**

One speaker at the PPDP Workshop was Dr Mohamed Altawil from the Palestine Trauma Centre at the University of Herts. Dr Altawil has recently published a research project on the effects of the Intifada on the Palestinian community, and he shared some of his findings with the workshop.

Dr Altawil's study examined the impact of "chronic traumatic experience" on children living in the Gaza Strip. He assessed 1,137 children aged between ten and eighteen, finding that during the six years of the Intifada (2000 – 2006), every child in Palestine had been subjected to traumatic events at least three times. These traumas were defined as "demolition of their homes, detention, shelling, humiliation, killing and injuries among themselves or their families or neighbours," with the devastating impact of these events compounded by other circumstances such as lack of food, medicine, fuel, clean water and green areas, regular power cuts, high rates of unemployment and poverty, ongoing refugee status and general hopelessness.

Unsurprisingly, Dr Altawil found that high numbers of Palestinian children suffered from Mental Health Disorders (MHDs) as a result of their experiences. 25% of his subjects were suffering from cognitive symptoms, such as insomnia, and 22% from emotional symptoms, including chronic anxiety, nightmares, depression and bed-wetting. 22% also exhibited social behavioral disorders, such as rude and aggressive behavior and rejection of authority; 17% suffered from academic dysfunction, and 14% displayed 'somatic' symptoms, including headaches, stomach aches and hypochondria.

The study's conclusions pointed to a dire need for "a professional service institution with the capacity to provide psychological, social and health services for the victims of war" in the Gaza Strip. Without vastly improved support services, fears Dr Altawil, this traumatized community risks becoming "too weak to recover".

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