

21 September 2016

Palestine: Celebration of the International Day of Peace at the Sumud Story House, by Arab Educational Institute

The 21st of September was designated by the United Nations as the International Day of Peace and is celebrated all over the world. At the Sumud Story House we had even more occasions to celebrate: Eid al-Adha (the Muslim Sacrifice Feast), the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel and the visit of a German group of IPPNW and Pax Christi members. This year's topic was "Dismantling barriers".

The meeting started with some words by Rania Murra, the director of the AEI, who welcomed the people who came to the Sumud Story House and by Fuad Giacaman, co-founder of the AEI, who presented the main objectives and activities of the World Peace Week. During the World Week for Peace in Palestine that is held from 18th to 24th of September, believers around the world especially in Palestine will send a clear message to tell policy-makers and the international community about the need for a just peace settlement that ends the illegal occupation and secures the legitimate rights of the two peoples. In this week, AEI and other national Christian organizations have organized and joined in events and activities around the three principles agreed upon: to pray, to educate about actions that will lead to peace and to advocate with others to promote justice and peace. Mr. Fuad read also the AEI statement addressed to Norbert Richter (the German Pax Christi leader of the visiting group) who was prevented to enter Israel. The AEI condemns this as a serious infringement of human rights and a putting of obstacles to the functioning of our peace movement in promoting just peace.

Afterward we had a lecture by Sheigh 'Abdil Magid Al'Amarnah, the Mufti of Bethlehem, and Dr. Jack Sara, president of the Bible College. They spoke about the meaning of the sacrifice that plays an important role for both religions, Muslims and Christians. Even if there are some differences in the understanding of the sacrifice, there are substantial commonalities such as the huge importance of God's will for our lives and the great example of Abraham's faith and obedience. In highlighting the commonalities and respecting the differences we have the chance to learn from each other and to find strength in that community in order to resist the occupation in a peaceful way. After a lively discussion we had a presentation of some songs of the women's choir. They sang about peace and Sumud (steadfastness).

Then it was planned to put new posters on the Wall Museum that show a commitment to the peaceful struggle of the people of the AEI as well as all the people working for an end of occupation and a just peace in Palestine and Israel. It was initiated at the Pax Christi International Conference that took place in May 2015 in Bethlehem. We read the commitment on a Powerpoint presentation in English and Arabic and later on we installed the two posters on the wall near Claire Anastas' house, one of the AEI women's group member whose house is surrounded by the wall.

Then, we went in silence to the gate of the wall, holding our hands and standing all together in solidarity with each other just next to the wall: Germans and Palestinians, Christians and Muslims. After a moment of silence when we commemorated those who lost their lives in Palestine and the whole region, we had a prayer coming from the German group that expressed the hope that one day that wall just in front of us would fall as it happened in Berlin in 1989 in a peaceful way. We sang the song "Dona nobis pacem" that means "Give peace to us" before Rojer Salameh from the Youth Media House read a prayer in Arabic asking for hope and strength to go ahead with the nonviolent struggle against the occupation. A

very strong moment was a little sketch. A woman who was blindfolded was straying and asking for help because she could not see. She asked Sabine Farrouh, the leader of the German group, to take the scarf down when the choir began to sing: "I can't see beyond the wall. If this is justice, freedom means nothing at all." It showed in a very impressive way what the wall means to the people who are living in front of the wall and do not have the possibility to see beyond as if they were blind. We all have the responsibility to seek for an end of the occupation, in our environments and with our potentials and talents – in a peaceful way.

We completed the celebration by having the dinner all together back in the Sumud Story House, sitting together and talking. It was a great atmosphere and a good experience to feel that we are all together on the same way.







