

**The Palestinian Centre For Rapprochement Between People (PCR)**



**PCR**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2009**

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# **PCR Annual Narrative Report For the year 2009**

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## **Introduction:**

This is a report of the activities and projects implemented by the Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People (PCR) during the year 2009.

**Mission:** PCR works to bridge the gap between Palestinians and peoples from all around the world, informing the public about the reality in Palestine, and empowering the community through nonviolent direct action.

## **Goals:**

- 1) Promote arriving at a just and peaceful Palestine
- 2) Promote harmony and rapprochement within society and between societies
- 3) Raise awareness, Provide accurate and first hand information about Palestine
- 4) Enhance civic duty and civic responsibility especially for empowering youth, women, and for marginalized segments of our society.

PCR had a very rich and productive 20 years. They can be divided into these periods:

### **1988-1994 – First Intifada Period**

During the first uprising, PCR pioneered nonviolent resistance. We provided training to locals in conflict resolution management, peaceful resistance, and cross-cultural dialogue. We were the first group in the West Bank to have a formal and periodic (bi-weekly) dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. This dialogue continued on a regular pace for 12 years even as the uprising and the violence escalated. It kept the hope alive of coexistence and peace.

PCR played an important role in organizing the 1989 tax resistance (No Taxation without Representation) that gained the admiration of people of good will around the world including our Israeli colleagues and dozens of international visitors who visited even during siege and curfew.

That experience taught us to learn to disseminate information and was a prelude to our accelerated media efforts during the second uprising.

### **1994-2000 – Oslo and Post- Oslo period**

The decrease in violence during the Oslo years did not decrease our commitment and interest in peace making and direct action. PCR with support from the Israeli members of the dialogue group supported the land defense committees that challenged the building of settlements on Palestinian lands. The most prominent case, PCR was involved in was Jabal Abu Ghneim where we kept a protest tent in operation with Israelis and internationals for four months 24 hours a day. We challenged the settlement activities in Israeli courts including this case that moved for nearly four years (a good delay for us) until the Israeli Supreme court ruled in favor of the State and in violation of International law.

PCR did not feel defeated. To protect Beit Sahour Land threatened by the “Har Homa” settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim, we worked with a number of groups and land owners to encourage buildings on their lands as close as is feasible to the settlement. These threatened lands we knew would be protected if we had people living there. This included a housing project in the area of Mazmouria. The land belongs to people from Beit Sahour, however, as residents of the West Bank, we can not build houses there, because that land was identified within the borders of Jerusalem. Therefore Jerusalemites were the perfect candidates for such a project.

A housing committee was founded that included people from Jerusalem who need to build houses, but do not have land in Jerusalem. One land owner with an area of around 40 dunams agreed to include his land in this project. The idea was to plan a housing project on that land, apply for building permits from the municipality of Jerusalem and if permits were granted, the members of the housing committee will buy lots in this land. In this case, the land owner is selling his land to people from Jerusalem to build houses.

A Palestinian famous architect who lives in Jordan, volunteers most of his effort and time in planning the area and designed houses with Arabic architecture. The municipality of Jerusalem refused to allow the housing society to officially submit the full application and kept asking for modifications. In October 2000, shortly after the second intifada started, the Israeli army built a military road to connect the settlement on Abu Ghneim with the military base in Beit Sahour, and with other settlements. This road went right through the project's land, which was the last nail in the coffin for this project. But the experience was worthwhile and the citizens of Beit Sahour developed housing projects very near the "Har Homa" settlement (but outside of the illegally expanded and illegally annexed East Jerusalem lands).

In those years, PCR also developed programs for training youth and women in leadership positions, expanded its activities in community development and education, and hosted many international delegations on fact finding and solidarity trips.

### **2000-2009 – Second Intifada Period**

Our community service program was expanded and made a formal division of PCR. We engaged more youth with nonviolent resistance. In one capacity building program 70 young Palestinians received training in advocacy, communication skills, conflict resolution and democracy. When trained and empowered these young advocates became the backbone of other PCR and community activities.

One project we pioneered and led by the young people was the Displaced Shepherd project which aimed at renovating homes damaged as a result of the Israeli shelling of the Eastern neighborhood of Beit Sahour from the military base in Ush Ghrab.

The young activists of PCR visited all families and documented damages and recorded stories. They uploaded all this information as family profiles on the internet. This information was used a fund raising campaign in which raised \$400,000 dollars raised with the municipality of Beit Sahour as a joint effort. As a result, almost all families managed to return to their homes in few months.

In 2000, we mobilized our dialogue group and international friends for actions to reclaim the military base that was located on town land and was a major issue in the community. We successfully held nonviolent protests at the base (even getting inside the base by the hundreds) and this success led to the formation of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). PCR was heavily involved in ISM for five years, during which it had employed around ninety percent of its efforts and finances to support ISM. PCR hosted ISM in its headquarters until 2005 when the headquarters was moved to Ramallah.

### **Current Structure**

Currently PCR has three departments, Alternative Travel Department, Community Service Department, and the Media Department.

**The Alternative Travel department** includes Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies.  
[[www.sirajcenter.org](http://www.sirajcenter.org)]

Siraj organizes an annual summer program, known as Palestine Summer Celebration. This extremely successful project gives participants have an opportunity to live with Palestinian Families, learn Arabic, volunteer at Palestinian NGOs, learn Palestinian culture (e.g. folklore dancing), and eat and cook Arabic food. These individuals also visit remote areas, tour the wall, the seam line, visit with Palestinians and Israelis inside and outside the Green Line. Siraj brings Palestinians and Internationals in its unique way at other times of the years and sometimes in unconventional tourism. One Peace Cycle projects brought European cyclists on a tour of the West Bank and another one for hikers.

### **The Community Service and Development Department**

This department aims at empowering young Palestinians in various fields to prepare a young leadership that cares. It also aims at providing a good environment for Christian and Muslim youth, males and females to work together for a better future.

The department is currently running two projects, the “Education for All” program” and “Tunes for Peace.” The education program is aimed at providing free-of-charge support classes for student of less fortunate families who need support to enhance their academic performance. So far, the program provided classes in Arabic and English in addition to non-curriculum activities such as communication skills, drama and art. The program attracted 25 young boys and girls, Christians and Muslims from the five schools in the town of Beit Sahour. The program is still running with funds from “A La Calle”, an Italian organization working for social change.

The Tunes for Peace project is mainly a music training project that aims at providing music training for young people on five main instruments, namely Oud, Violin, Guitar, Saxophone and percussions. So far there are around 20 young students from Bethlehem area. The project started in May 2009. In addition to empowering young Palestinians through music, the project will allow PCR to create a musical group that will be able to perform it music in local and international forums.

The department has also completed “The Young Advocates Program” YAP which is a capacity building program that aims at preparing young Palestinians form more involvement in their society and in the civil based nonviolent resistance in Palestine. The program is a continuation of the community program launched in 1997. Around 30 young people from Bethlehem area were involved and received basic and advanced training in Human Rights, Communication Skills, Media and Web Design and Advocacy skills. The program was funded by Oxfam-GB and the Mennonite Central Committee.

The CSD department has also completed a training project in video production. The project aimes at enabling young people in tension areas in the West Bank to use video cameras to document nonviolent activities in their regions. The project focused on producing Public Service Announcements, that are short video blurbs that usually does not exceed 30 seconds, but carries a political or social message.

The participants were from Bethlehem, Hebron, Ni'lin and Bil'in. The project was funded by Oxfam-GB, Mennonite Central Committee and the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

Currently, the CS department is preparing to start a new video production training for the graduates of the Education for All project who has completed the first phase.

**The Media Department** contains the International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC). Being a joint Palestinian-International effort, IMEMC combines Palestinian journalists' deep understanding of the context, history, and the socio-political environment with International journalists' skills in non-partisan reporting.

IMEMC provides fair and comprehensive coverage of events and developments in Israel-Palestine.

Recently, IMEMC Started to provide Spanish Language coverage as an attempt to outreach a wider readership. The Spanish edition of IMEMC is completely run by volunteers, from Barcelona, Palestine and other places.

IMEMC is a founding member of the network of United Radio and TV Stations (NUR Media). IMEMC provides coverage of news, political developments and daily incidents combined with feature stories, political analysis, interviews and selected opinion pieces. IMEMC provides a daily news cast in English and Italian languages, which provides nearly five minutes featuring main incidents of the day. In addition IMEMC produces a weekly audio summary of socio-political developments in Israel-Palestine to keep you updated.

IMEMC also provides field reports on main issues of interest to its targeted audience. The IMEMC production unit will produce documentaries that feature marginalized issues and people in remote villages. In addition, IMEMC has a vision to provide positive news from Palestine through video which will fill a gap in the news about Palestine.

The International main stream media lacks reports from Palestine on the hardship that Palestinians face because of the Israeli occupation in Palestine and also lacks any good and positive news from Palestine.

The little reporting creates a very negative image about this part of the world and reinforces stereotypes. Consequently, the cultural cap between the Palestinians and the western society is growing as time passes. For peace to be achieved in this region, understanding between the Palestinians and the Western world is needed. Without this understanding western communities will continue to antagonize the Palestinians since they know very little about their culture and cause.

Media plays a very important role in creating this understanding or misunderstanding. We strongly believe that the past twenty years of PCR's work contributed tremendously in bridging the gap between the Palestinians and grassroots people from many countries around the globe. The last five years, since IMEMC was established, more and more average Americans, and Europeans became more informed about the area which helps decrease the gap and make chances for peace much closer.

## **1. Community service and Development Department**

### **Summary:**

The Community Service and Development Department implemented four projects during the reported period, two of which are ongoing, while the other two are concluded. In addition, the department implemented a number of activities in the region.

### **I. The Gaza War Protests:**

As soon as the war was declared on Gaza on December 27, 2008, PCR started efforts to organize a protest against this war. PCR efforts were met with efforts by other activists and organizations in Bethlehem area and everybody called for a gathering at the nativity square in Bethlehem.

Hundreds of people gathered at the nativity square and were joined shortly by hundreds and dozens of internationals. The gathering turned into a big march from the Nativity Square to the UN

headquarters in Bethlehem demanding an immediate intervention to protect the Palestinian population in Gaza from the Israeli attacks.

PCR was approached by the Alternative Information Center in Beit Sahour to organize together a daily vigil in Beit Sahour. As an integral part of PCR's philosophy this idea was immediately welcomed and the vigil became a daily part of our work; everyday at Souk El-Shaab area around 6 pm. People carried black flags, and banners and signs expressing their rejection to the war on Gaza during the 21 days of the war.

During the vigils, people discussed options of actions to be carried out against the war, and one of the ideas that came out of the vigils, were days of advocacy actions.

PCR also hosted local and international activists for days of action on the advocacy level. Activists made calls to officials, parliament members in Europe, Congress people in the US and other UN officials calling for an immediate intervention to end the war.

PCR prepared a list of 25 actions that ordinary people can take to support the efforts of ending the war on Gaza. The actions included, contacting media, politicians, writing petitions and also sending donations to the people of Gaza. A list of these actions can be found here: (<http://www.pcr.ps/activities/actions-gaza.htm>)

### ***The One Year Gaza Anniversary***

The year was concluded with an activity in commemoration of the first anniversary for the war on Gaza (December 08 – January 09).

The activity, which was conducted in cooperation with a number of local organizations in Bethlehem area, was held at the nativity square in Bethlehem, on December 31, 2009 in the evening.

At 4:30 this afternoon residents from Bethlehem and the surrounding towns in addition to a number of International supporters gathered to commemorate the 1,500 Palestinians that lost their lives in Israel's 21-day war against the Gaza Strip, and stand in solidarity with the residents of Gaza.

After a brief introduction given by a young girl from Aida Refugee Camp, those in attendance received a call from Dr. Haidar Eid, from inside the Gaza Strip. Dr. Eid, an associate professor in the Department of English Literature, AL-Aqsa University, Gaza Strip and also works as a grass roots activist, spoke of the necessity of the ending of the siege on Gaza, and thanked those in attendance, both local residents of the Bethlehem municipality and internationals alike.

Following Dr. Eid was Dr. Victor Batarseh, mayor of Bethlehem. Dr. Batarseh spoke in a similar vein, endorsing the support of the Gazans and reminding all to keep the plight of their plight in their thoughts.

Today was a day to commiserate the loss of vast numbers of children in Gaza, but also to celebrate the beauty of youth and be hopeful for their future. Children from Al-Ruwad Centre located in Aida refugee camp treated the crowd to a performance, and then followed by a speech by spokesman for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, Awad Abu Swai.

It was again the turn of the children to take centre stage. As a local boy, no more than 11 years old read the names of those children killed by the Israeli military during the Gaza War last December and January, more children were assisted in climbing the small trees in the square, decorated still

will lights from the Christmas festivities, to hang BDS movement stickers bearing the names that were simultaneously read out.

Four of the children from the earlier performance piece sang songs, as others walked amongst the crowd handing out stickers and candles for the vigil.

Dr. Abdul Fattah Abu Srour, director of Al-Ruwad Centre, gave the final speech, once again thanking all in attendance and wishing everyone a happy new year. As the music started to play five young men spontaneously broke out in Dabka dancing to mark the end of the vigil.

## **II. Angelo Frammartino Educational Center**

### ***A. Tunes for Peace Project***

Tunes for Peace is a mixture of a cultural activity and a youth empowerment idea at the same time. At the time young Palestinians are trained to play music, their character is getting built up and they are empowered to be more effective in their community.

The trainees are tuned to play and listen to authentic music instead of the new commercial music. In addition, Tunes for Peace mixes between eastern and western instruments in a way that joins cultures together. While all the trainers are locals, a vision to have some international volunteers to add a new touch to the project is open.

This will also open chances for cross-cultural cooperation and will give the students new insight about music.

The project started in May 2009 with initial fund of 5000 Euros from a group of Italian activists who raised the money by organizing concerts and activities in a number of Italian cities.

With this fund, we managed to purchase the musical instruments, (Ouds, Guitars, handrums, Violins and Saxophone, in addition to some accessories and a keyboard.) the rest of the fund was used to pay the teachers and the project supervisor.

In the Palestinian context, building a musical group in a local town, one where Christians and Muslims live together creates an opportunity for them form a single unit, where they share their skills and experiences, and thereby enrich the local spirit. It is this idea that supports our goal of building local bridges between the Palestinian people and the international community as well. Moreover, this musical experience allows students to release their emotions and express themselves creatively. Through campaigns that compose strong music and dynamic lyrics, they also relate to and unite people in the common goals of peace and justice.

It is for these reasons that the "Tunes for Peace" project has been initiated. The project, which aims to integrate music into the lives of Palestinian youth, will be implemented by the Angelo Frammartino Educational Center (AFEC) which is part of the Community Service and Development Department in PCR. The Angelo Frammartino Educational Center was established in March 2008 with a major support of the Italian youth organization, A La Calle.

It is a fact that there are many young Palestinians in the Beit Sahour community who wish to learn music and possess the skills, but cannot afford to pay for the proper equipment nor the expensive fees to attend a music school. Therefore, this project will serve as a support center for those students, and will also complement the goals of the Angelo Frammartino Educational Center to give Palestinian students an opportunity to develop their musical knowledge and abilities.

The program will also allow both christian and muslim youth to interact together through a learning process and later work together as a group, which will enhance the local christian-muslim ties in Beit Sahour, that is one of the few cities with Christian majority. PCR has always promoted Christian-Muslim relations through sharing life, work and experience rather than preaching about it, a method that has been proven successful along the 22 years of PCR's work.

Currently the program focuses on a target group of 20 students aged 12 to 16, with preference given to lower income families who are not able to cover the cost of conservatory fees. The most promising students, recommended by teachers, were chosen from several different schools. Some had previous music experience and some had not, however, all participated in a trial workshop, where the final group was selected. From there, the group is divided into sets of players. Thus far, there are five instrument sets, the alto saxophone, violin, guitar, 'Oud, and percussion sections.

A musical band is being formed now of 11 students performing the five instruments. A video of the first concert is available at this link:

In this concert, which was held November 21, 2009, students played a number of musical pieces solo and as a group. The audience of the concert were the parents of the trainees.

The trainers are highly professional and have taught and played music for a number of years despite of their young age. Each one of them is either a main member or the leader of a musical group.

The group leader and music supervisor Mr. Wassim Qassis is adopting a participatory approach in training the group. He gives them a chance to have an input on the song they want to play and to improvise which encourages them to be more creative and increases the feeling of ownership somehow to the pieces they are playing.

#### **Plans for the future:**

we are planning to have a CD for the group with at least 10 tracks included. The content of the CD will also be prepared to be performed on stage in live concerts. In addition, we are planning to add more instruments that will add a new taste to some of the pieces they play. Cultural exchange with people from different parts of the world is among our interests for this project as well.

#### ***B. Education for All Project***

The Education for all project is also a community service one that aims at providing an alternative education program that is basically an attempt to support Palestinian children who need extra lessons but are unable to afford it, because of financial restrictions, and to prepare the younger generation for a better civic and democratic life and strengthen their belonging and integration into their community. The project also aims at increasing networking and coordination among the related Palestinian organizations.

The project started in early 2008 and was co-funded by Oxfam-GB. Oxfam-GB's support was limited to three months only as there was a partnership with four other organizations from Bethlehem, Nablus and Jerusalem area.

For the project to realize its main aim, the following objectives have to be met.

1. Prepare teachers for new methods of education
2. Exchange experience among network member organizations
3. Enhance Communication skills for young Palestinians
4. Provide good alternative academic education

5. Introduce them to Civic Society and Democracy Values
6. Promote the use of Nonviolence in solving conflict on different levels
7. Increase their knowledge of Human Rights and History and current issues that the Palestinian Society is facing
8. Involve the youth in community activities

The program suggests new ways of teaching, in addition to extra-curricular activities that aims at raising awareness of young students of things around them. Participants of this program will:

1. Receive support classes in relative subjects
2. Stay away from the streets, and will not stay at home do nothing
3. Start building community values at this critical stage of their lives

On the other hand, the project will provide jobs for Palestinian teachers and trainers, and will give a chance for children of less fortunate families to receive free-of-charge educational support.

Some new members joined the group to benefit from the free classes given to them in Arabic and English languages.

The second stage of the program is implemented only in Beit Sahour schools.

A new English teacher joined the project after Hana Kidan decided to leave. So, Raghda Sar'awi from Beit Sahour is the new teacher of English.

Students received in addition to the Arabic and English classes, training sessions in Communication Skills, Civil Society and Democracy workshops, in addition to presentations about the History of the Palestinian situation.

Students also received some entertaining Drama and Rap singing workshops by Tornado Lights rap group from Bethlehem.

Teachers in the schools reported to PCR that the students are very happy for being in this program as they feel that they are doing better in school.

Late 2009 a new group of around 30 students were recruited to the program and started to take classes in Arabic and English languages.

A special followup program was planned for the older students who are now in their tenth grade. An agreement has been made with PAIDIA for International Development to provide communication skills training for the young students in order to help them engage more actively in their community and the other PCR programs and activities.

A core group has been formed of 10 students, most of them were involved in the Education for All project.

#### **Future plans:**

To continue to provide classes for the younger students, and to provide more alternative training and capacity building for the older ones. Mathematics will be introduced to the teaching upon request from most of the new students. On the other hand, a project proposal have been submitted to the Opportunities Fund of the United National Habitat program and was awarded a fund of \$16,700 to implement a video production training.

### **III. Shepherds Nights Festival 2009**

The Shepherds' Nights Festival is an annual festival developed in PCR in 2008. Before being a festival it was a traditional candle procession that PCR has been organizing since 1991.

The festival, which is a joint project between PCR and the Joint Advocacy Initiative of the YMCA/YWCA (JAI) is planned to become an annual event in Beit Sahour.

The 2009 festival was conducted in three nights, and was held at the YMCA-Beit Sahour football field. The first night, December 23, was a cultural and arts night, that included performances for local Palestinian groups from Bethlehem area. "Irtijal" was the first group to perform and has presented a number of songs for the famous Lebanese singer, Fairuz in addition to some Christmas Carols. "Irtijal" was followed by a folklore dancing group of the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour who performed a number of dances accompanied by folklore music and songs. The opening of the festival was under the patronage of Her Excellency Dr. Khuloud Deibis, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities who delivered a speech at the opening ceremony.

The second day, December 24, Christmas Eve was on two parts. The early afternoon part was dedicated to the children. A special clown show that lasted for around two hours gathered over three hundred children who sang, danced and had fun together with Rony Rock and his team. Santa Clause then had some Christmas gifts to the children.

In the evening, The Bethlehem Bible College choir chanted all the evening christmas carols and other hymns. The Choir is one of the very impressive groups in Bethlehem area has participated in a number of international festivals.

The third day, December 25, Christmas Day, we organized the annual candle procession which was dedicated this year to Jerusalem. Every year the candle procession has a special dedication, since 1991. So, this year's procession was titled, "Light a Candle for Jerusalem". This also coincided with the declaration of Jerusalem, the Capital of Arab culture.

More than 2000 people joined the march which started at the Greek Orthodox Shepherds' Field Site in Beit Sahour. Marchers lit their torches and carried signs calling to end all kinds of colonization in Jerusalem and to allow the Palestinians free access to Jerusalem, especially for worship. Palestinians are the only nation in the world who need a special permit to access Jerusalem, that is rarely granted.

The march arrived at the festival site where Sa'eed Zarzar, a local singer from Bethlehem canted some hymns and Christmas Carols on Christmas day. Zarzar was followed by a group of folklore dancers. Kazar group performed some of the popular folklore dances that are not very much performed these days.

On the side of the three-day festival, there was a local market as well. We setup kiosks for vendors and gave them space to sell their fair-trade products. Six kiosks were provided, presenting all hand-made and home-made products. One of the vendors provided food and snacks, while the other provided some home-made sweets. A third kiosk presented their home-made chocolates and three others provided handicrafts., both embroidery and olive wood products, while the sixth presented hand made greeting cards, made by disabled people.

The goal behind the market was to encourage local products on one hand, and on the other hand, to create an environment beyond music and songs.

The Festival is designed to be a permanent one, that creates a new touristic attraction in Beit Sahour, that is known as the Shepherds' Field, according to the biblical stories.

The future plans for this festival also is to host some international groups and we have made arrangements with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to put the festival on their annual agenda and we will contact tour operators to put the festival on the their Christmas Programs as well, to attract as many tourists as possible for this event.

#### **IV. Osh Ghrab Activities**

In addition to the organized projects ,PCR has a enough space for other activities that are also in the of its belief. PCR promoted and organized in cooperation with some other local organizations, a number of activities and protests in Osh Ghrab site, where Israeli military and settlers are trying to set up military and settler presence. Osh Ghrab was an occupied Israeli military base for 39 years, since 1967. In 2006, the Israeli military left the area, but kept it under military order.

After the evacuation of the Israeli military and the dismantling of the military base, the municipality of Beit Sahour set plans to renovate the area and managed to build a public park, that includes a garden, restaurent, hall, playgrounds and other facilities open for the local community of Beit Sahour and Bethlehem area in general.

The municipality also had plans to build a hospital in the site. However, Israeli settlers from the neighboring illegal settlements started to organize activities in the area and publicly announced their rejection to the construction of a hospital in the area and declared plans to build a jewish center in the area that they insist is a jewish area and “Arabs” has no place in it.

PCR, together with a number of organizations and individuals from Beit Sahour immediately started to move against the settler activities which were launched on May 15, 2008 by a settler group called, “Women in Green”. A number of painting activities have been organized in Osh Ghrab in an attempt to maintain presence in the area. Israeli settlers assaulted the activists a number of times, who managed to de-escalate the situation and end the confrontation without anyone being hurt.

Part of our attempts to peruse leal action against the settlers was through Yesh-Din, an Israeli law organization. Activists in Yesh-Din said we can sue the Israeli military in the Israeli High Court, however, this legal action might endanger the already existing structures that the Municipality managed to build, simply because they are not licensed by the Israeli authorities, which puts all these structures in danger of being demolished.

PCR also continued to invite international groups on both grassroots and diplomatic levels to come to Osh Ghrab in addition to Journalists.

#### **V. The Nonviolence Network in Arab Countries (NNAC)**

##### **2. Media Department – The International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC)**

##### **Summary:**

The media department continue to run the International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC) project despite of financial limitations facing all attempts to develop its activities. Therefore, IMEMC continued to produce the daily news reports and occasional human interest stories in addition to some selective interviews and op-ed pieces.

Thanks to donations of individual friends of IMEMC and the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) and the General Board of Global Ministries, who contributed to the sustainability of IMEMC.

IMEMC also continued to produce its daily audio reports, "Palestine Today" and weekly "This Week in Palestine". A great listenership has developed in Canada as the montreal based, cKut airs the reports on regular and some other campus radio stations air them frequently. This left an impact on the website as well, where Canada occupies the first rank in readership numbers. KBOO Radio in Portland Oregon, and Pacifica Radio in California frequently broadcast Palestine Today and This Week in Palesatine, as they provide a good account of incidents and political developments in Palestine.

IMEMC also continue to develop its video production unit which managed to produce a number of short documentaries during the year.

On the other hand, IMEMC has been used by a number of radio stations and other solidarity and human rights groups in addition to some alternative media outlets as one of its main source of information about Palestine. Additionally IMEMC is a regular source of information to many international organizations and diplomatic missions working in Palestine.

In addition, the IMEMC Audio Production unit produces special headlines and feature stories for Free Speech Radio News (FSRN) in the USA.

Because of financial limitations, IMEMC had to stop its Spanish edition. The Spanish edition of IMEMC News was completely dependent on volunteers, who either worked from their homes or from the office in Palesatine, which was not enough to sustain the Spanish Service. On the other hand, the Spanish edition attracted a good number of readers and encouraged an organization like the Institute of Political Studies for Latin America and Africa (IEPALA), to depend on IMEMC as a main source of information on Palestine/Israel situation. During the year 2009, IEPALA used around 400 news items from IMEMC, where as only 200 news items were used from Maan News Agency, the strongest Palestinian online news agency so far.

In the meantime, IMEMC continue to develop its video production unit and produced two short documentaries, in addition to documenting activities and projects organized by PCR.

One short video was about the fourth anniversary for the Bil'in nonviolent struggle and another was the Abraham Path Initiative, which Siraj, the alternative Travel Department is part of.

IMEMC also continued to provide a comprehensive coverage of the nonviolent resistance in the Palestinian Areas in all its forms of reporting. During the reported period, IMEMC produced at least 52 audio reports, named "This Week in Palestine" every Friday in which it highlighted the nonviolent protests in the West Bank and the Gaz Strip when available. The Free Gaza Movement activities and the various popular convoys to Gaza were all reported on IMEMC with first hand accurate information from the source.

Also during the year, IMEMC produced 240 audio reports named, "Palestine Today" in which a summary of events, and incidents in the West Bank and Gaza were reported and sometimes supported by interviews from the ground.

The IMEMC video production unit is expected to become an income generating unit which might help with IMEMC's running expenses. The Equipment was rented to local and international film makers as well for a reasonable price.

In 2009, the IMEMC had an average daily visitors of 2500 generating nearly 6000 visits per day and around 2 million hits per month. The number of visitors increased dramatically during the war on Gaza. IMEMC covered the war on Gaza thoroughly and provided first hand account of the incidents in feature stories by our Gaza Correspondant Rami Al-Meghari.

According to ALEXA, the Web Information Company's website, IMEMC is ranking 410,906 in the world. Although the number seems to be big, yet, taking into consideration the huge number of site worldwide, we believe this is a good number. On the other hand, IMEMC ranks 180,110 in the US and has links from 805 other websites in the world.

Almost 57% of the audience of IMEMC are from the United States, while 14% are from Indonesia, and nearly 5% are from Canada.

ALEXA also indicates that most of our audience are Males, above the age of 45, who either had a post graduate degree and brows IMEMC from home or CEO's and mid-level politicians who browse IMEMC from from work. Although youth are very important, however, this age group in the Europe and the United States mainly are a very important target group, as this age group occupies important positions, such as CEOs, University professors and mid-level politicians. This reflects the potential impact IMEMC could have on Western communities, by providing them with another angel of the news in Palestine different from the angle received from the corporate media.

### **3. Alternative Travel Department – Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies**

Siraj, the main project of the Alternative Travel Department, continued to develop alternative tourist programs and has also implemented its annual Palestine Summer Celebration. Siraj has also facilitated trips for the Abraham Path initiative and the Peace Cycle in addition to a number of solidarity, and tourist groups.

Siraj aims to create links between Palestinian people and people from around the globe through educational tourism, interfaith and ecumenical dialogue, and culture and youth exchange programs.

Siraj Continued its work in alternative travel programs, and it was able to tours for around 285 People from different Countries to Palestine.

The Main achievement for Siraj Center in year 2009, that Siraj Center Was approved by the Palestinian Tourism Ministry and received the Travel license which Allow Siraj Center to arrange any kind of tours for International Visitors.

Currently Siraj has five permanent staff and a number of general and local tour guides who work upon request.

#### ***Arab Women Union Guesthouse***

Siraj Center was day by day observing the renovation work in Arab Women Union Guesthouse, by giving feedback and instructions to the workers. The Guesthouse was expected to be ready by November of 2009, however, because of some delay in the funds, the work in the guest house is expected to be done on April 2010.

The renovation of the guesthouse is a result of cooperation agreement signed between PCR and the Arab Women Union, upon which PCR will manage the guesthouse and market it and share the income with the Arab Women Union. La Asociación Europea de Cooperación con Palestina (ASECOP), provided the needed funds for the renovation and for training a number of women in

hotel management skills to become potential candidates for the guesthouse when it is ready to work.

More than 40 women from Bethlehem area attended training workshops for around three months, in food preservation, beverages, English language and computer skills.

When done, the guesthouse will be able to accommodate around 35 guests in 15 rooms. The guesthouse is expected to generate income to both, Siraj Center and the Arab Women Union, which will help decrease dependence on foreign aid.

### ***Youth Exchange Programs***

In cooperation with the Sabeel Center, Siraj Arranged two days program for 40 Youth students from America, whom toured Bethlehem Area and get more information about the political situation, also they were hosted by local families, which allowed them to learn more about the local cultural.

### ***Fact Finding Programs***

Siraj Arranged tours for almost 192 Visitors from Different Countries (America, Ireland, Japan, Italy, France, Canada), the Program included Meeting and Visit with , peace activists, political officials, and human rights organizations from both sides. Program participants will be able to meet with representatives from B'tselem, Ittijah, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Temporary International Presence in Hebron, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, The Right of Education Campaign, and The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People. Participants can also visit various refugee camps and unrecognized villages, and attend lectures and events in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Ramallah.

### ***Christian Programs***

Siraj Hosted different Groups that is coming for Pilgrimage Program to Palestine , groups was guided by Local Palestinian Tour guide and Overnight by Palestinian Christian Families , and visit most Religious Places in Palestinian .

### ***Hiking and Cultural Programs***

Siraj in year 2009 was able to arrange more than 5 Hiking Tours with the Cooperation of Abraham Path and Alternative Tourism Group. three Tours was arranged for the Abraham Path trail From Nablus to Ramallah, Participants was able to experience about the wonderful landscape of Palestine, and to experience the local cultural by overnight by local families.

Also with the cooperation with the Alternative Tourism Group Study Center (ATG), Siraj arranged two Nativity Trail tours from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

### ***Local Host Family Programs***

Due to Siraj Connections , Siraj Was able to arrange hundreds of overnights nights by local Families in Bethlehem Area , Both Locals and Visitors was able to Get close idea about different cultural , and that generate a good income for the local families.

During the reported period, Siraj has injected around \$21,000 dollars in direct payments for the families in Beit Sahour and Bethlehem, which provides a very good support to the families.

### ***The Peace Cycle***

Siraj Arranged the program for the 18 Cyclist from Jordan to Palestinian, Participants was from UK, Germany and Belgium and Cyprus , and they cycled from Amman to Madaba, then to Nazareth, and then to Jenin and Nablus and Tulkarem and Billin and Ramallah and Bethlehem and Hebron and Jerusalem. Participants overnight by local families and in Palestinian Refugee camps , and met with local palestinian leaders and Organizations , and visited Bethlehem University .

### ***Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism (PIRT)***

Michael Awad was nominated by PIRT community to represent PIRT in the International Travel Fair in Berlin (ITB), Mr. Awad made a presentation about the injustice Tourism Situation in Palestine in the ITB, attended by around 100 tourism experts. After the ITB, Mr. Awad went to Austria and Switzerland to meet with Travel Agents to simulate them to make their program more balanced and to spend more times in the Palestinian Cities .

### ***Cultural Programs***

With the Cooperation with Ananta Travel Agent in France, Siraj Was able to arrange the First Palestinian Program that show Palestine as a Destination, and allow Participants to spend more time in Palestine and Experience the Local Cultural

### ***Olive Harvest***

Siraj Was able in year 2009 to arrange the Olive Harvest Program, almost 6 participants attend the program and spend the time in Jenin Area and participants in the olive picking.

### ***The Abraham Path Initiative (API)***

Siraj is one of the main partners in Palestine for the Abraham Path Initiative (API). The Abraham Path (Masar Ibrahim al Khalil) is a route of cultural tourism which follows the footsteps of Abraham/Ibrahim through the Middle East.

Siraj was able with the cooperation with Masar Ibrahim Elkhalil in Palestine to open the Path From Bethlehem to Hebron, and its ready now for Hikers to hike from Bethlehem To Hebron.

Also Siraj Participated in the Seminar that was Arranged by API Palestine in Bethlehem University , and Mr. George S. Rishmawi gave a presentation about Siraj's achievements in the API , and Mr. Awad gave a Presentation about how to implement the Code of conduct in the hike tours.

### ***Familiarization trip***

Siraj Center Hosted Two Russian Tour Leader , and Arranged for them a Tour in the Palestinian Cites to encourage them to bring more pilgrimage in Palestine

### ***The Palestinian Summer Celebration Program***

Again Siraj Offered their unique experience for internationals to not only visit Palestine, but to live Palestine, through its Summer Celebration Program 2009.

The program offers a chance for internationals to stay in Palestine for two months during the summer and live with Palestinian families. They will also have a chance to study Arabic and learn how to cook Palestinian food, and dance Palestinian folklore dance, “Dabka” and also learn about the Palestinian society from within. The program is in partnership with Bethlehem University, therefore students receive a certificate for the credits they study during the two months.

Below are testimonies of two of the participants in the 2009 Palestinian Summer Celebration.

### ***Victoria Close testimony***

My first week in Palestine has been incredible. Not only are all my planned activities with the Siraj Center great, but each and every hour of living here brings new and exciting experiences.

The group that I am with is awesome. It is small enough to get to know everybody well, but large

and diverse enough so that we can enjoy spending long days together. Everybody comes from a different background. It is always exciting to hear stories from the group members.

The classes are really fast-paced, but also really interesting. They may be hard for me because they are college courses and I am still in high school. In Arabic, we have already learned how to conjugate verbs in the past tense, and in Palestine History, we have a map quiz on Monday. We've only had four classes! Even so, I am happy to be learning so much in class.

I'm not sure how I feel about my volunteer work. I'm volunteering at the Arab Educational Institute, but I've only really worked for them once so far because of scheduling issues. I really like what the organization has done and is planning on doing though. They had thought that I was older before they met me, so they were going to have me teach a class. When I came into their office on the first day, they realized I couldn't be a teacher for a class with students the same age as me. Instead, they have me working as a photographer for a cultural project. I go to museums and take pictures of the things there. These pictures will go on a website for people to learn more about the culture of the Bethlehem area. While it's really cool to have my pictures posted on a website, I am afraid that the work might get repetitive and I might get bored.

The nighttime activities are really fun. I loved the Dabka class! At first, it was hard to do, but once I got into it, it was super fun. I can't wait for the lesson next week! The cooking class was also cool, but not as fun. I had wanted to cook the food myself, instead of only watching the cook do it. The movie was really good. I wish I could have watched it earlier in the day because I was so tired from the day's activities that when the movie started, it was hard for me to focus well. I am excited to meet the director of the movie though. The barbecue on Friday was just what I needed after a long week. I liked that we could just sit down, relax, talk, and laugh.

I really enjoyed the trip on Saturday because it showed me a lot of things I had never seen before. I hadn't known about the situation between the settlers and the Palestinians in Hebron until I watched Iron Wall. Before then, I had always thought that the settlers and Palestinians were always completely separate from each other and never interacted. Now I know that the settlements in Hebron and the Israeli people are a constant pressing force for the Palestinians that live there. Going to the refugee camp near Beit Sahour was interesting. I wish we could have gone through it and seen more of it instead of only looking at the wall though.

Overall, my time here has been awesome. I've learned so much and had such a great experience. Four weeks are not enough!

***Isabel Whitting testimony:***

Before coming to Palestine, I did, I think have a typically Western perspective on it and the so-called conflict. That is to say, I sympathized with the Palestinians but thought that there must be a reason why all this was happening, a reason that was the fault of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. There was also the small issue of my fear that I would arrive back in England after 6 weeks in Palestine missing my passport and several limbs... Happily, this did not occur. What did occur is that I gained a much deeper understanding of the Palestine-Israel situation, and an impatience to come back.

The Siraj Center program is a really good way of introducing yourself to Palestine; the way of life, the people, and the language. It also has the upside of not being boringly educational, but really really fun! It was fantastic to be able to volunteer in Palestinian organizations, and see how they manage to function under the occupation, as well as getting the chance to live with families, which I think is an important part of the program – it allows you a stable base in the country, which when

the situation itself is not totally so, is very reassuring. You also experience for a while what people here have to endure daily, not only by living with people but talking to them, which everyone is more than happy to do. What I was struck with here was the friendliness of the people – no matter what difficulties they might be facing.

Another good part of Siraj are the Arabic lessons at the university – it is much more satisfying if you try to speak in Arabic here, although sometimes a little dispiriting when people look at you as if you are speaking elfish with a gerbil in your throat – and I would definitely recommend them. If you stay with a family then the transition period from garbling incomprehensible phrases at people to being able to have a small conversation is much shorter.

The trips at the weekend are a lot of fun, and enable you to see more of the country and which areas have been most affected by the conflict. Needless to say the Dead Sea was very weird and very salty, but Nablus is stunning and Hebron fascinating. And then of course there are the Dabkeh dancing lessons. Hilarious. It is also the people who work for Siraj and the other people on the program who make it fun. George and Michel work tirelessly to ensure that everything runs smoothly, and they are both great people – very funny. I am so happy that I took part in this program, but don't think that I will really realize the impact this experience has had on me until I get home. I really urge people to come here and see Palestine, and not be scared off by the news – the fact is, Bethlehem is a very peaceful place. That is what I have realized here – that to truly get an idea about this part of the world, and the people and the problems in it, you have to come and see for yourself, and not be swayed by other people's ideas or preconceptions.

The five weeks I have spent here have been fantastic, but definitely not enough, and I will definitely be coming back. Having said that, I am still to go through security at the airport.

### **Conclusion:**

The three departments of PCR work together in full harmony to realize PCR's main goals of promoting peace and enhancing civic performance in addition to creating rapprochement within the Palestinian community and with other communities around the world.

PCR continues to reaffirm its commitment to nonviolence as a strategy to resist injustice and continues to prepare the young ones to lead the future by providing them with skills needed to be more actively involved in their communities.

PCR is planning now in cooperation with the Palestinian Heritage Preservation Center to renovate an old house in the old city of Beit Sahour to be used for one of its main projects.