

## A Birds-Eye View on Activities of Palestine IBBY

As noted on the IBBY web site, "Palestine was officially declared the 65th IBBY Section, during the Children's International Bologna Book Fair, April 2003" (<http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=445>). This was a remarkable accomplishment both for the Palestinians and for IBBY. Though we feel that we are at the beginning of the road, much is being achieved, despite the difficult situation the Palestinian people have to endure.

PBBY activities focus on implementing the goals IBBY by promoting and distributing quality children's books and networking with all sectors of the book industry. In 2007 we had an important workshop on editing and publishing conducted by a French expert, which also furthered PBBY's goal of cultural exchange.



### Great Welcome From Local Community Reflects The Importance Of These Libraries

Additionally, over the last two and a half years, PBBY has implemented a significant IBBY Children in Crisis Project in Beit Hanoun and the al-Shawka-Rafah Area in cooperation with two community-based societies. This project has introduced and promoted bibliotherapy



for traumatized children in these dangerous and marginalized areas. When the project started, we did not envision that the political situation would further deteriorate resulting in such horrible humanitarian tragedies.

at times because of safety issues. It was very difficult to transport purchased books from Ramallah to Gaza, because of road closures and blockades. It took much longer for the books to reach Gaza; moreover, in the last two years it was impossible to send any more children's books to Gaza.

After furnishing the libraries, buying the books, and appointing the two librarians/ facilitators, the library conducted several workshops on the importance of reading. Some of these workshops were with the mothers to encourage them to send their children to the libraries and to assure them that the library would



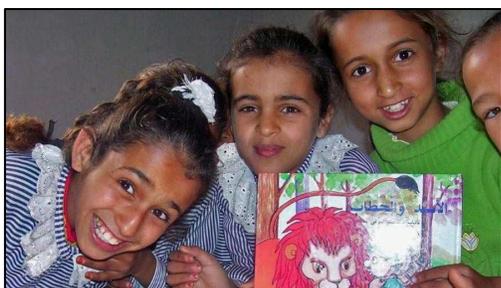
provide for both educational and recreational needs of their children. The libraries started work with the children in March 2008. It is interesting to note that the librarians volunteered their services for the first two months as they classified the books and prepared the library.



The library's activities include creative writing, story telling, drama, poetic games, drawing, book discussions, general knowledge competitions, the little journalist, handmade crafts and fine arts, and other interactive projects centered on Bibliotherapy and on encouraging the habit of reading among children. These psycho-social activities support children's self confidence, encourage their talents, and assist them psychologically by

providing stress release. Girls and boys are welcome as library members. Sometimes activities are done twice a day—morning and afternoon—as most schools in that area have two shifts.

In the second stage of the project, the librarians/facilitators and a group of school teachers, were supposed to have instruction from a more specialized Bibliotherapy trainer from Egypt. Unfortunately the siege on Gaza made this goal impossible. This was replaced by a five-day program conducted by experts in Gaza. Despite the very difficult situation and the shortage of basic humanitarian needs, the training succeeded with great enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the trainers and the trainees.



Parents were pleased with the library activities because it made their children less stressed and they saw happiness and joy on their faces once again. Parents were pleased that their children were not playing in areas full of land mines and explosives. Many parents visited the library and participated with their children in the library activities.

However, the last war left Gaza in a complete human disaster; around 1400 civilian killed, more than 359 children, and thousands of houses destroyed or damaged. Because of the Israeli siege, Gaza was reduced to primitive living, and the people have been denied their basic needs and rights. Thus, it was inevitable that IBBY would extend the Palestine Children in Crisis Project, provided by the generosity of



IBBY member donations, including our twinning partner, USBBY, and friends, prominent writers and human rights activists. Work in the libraries continued and was extended to do psycho-social work with children with special needs and juvenile children.



The war and the siege left traumatic scars on the children. The loss of loved ones and destruction of homes were horrendous. Moreover both libraries suffered from the traumatic deaths of two of their active members. In al-Shawka-Rafah PBBY Library, Mousa Barbakh and his cousin Yousef Barbakh, were killed and two sisters, Lama and Hia from Beit Hanoun PBBY Library, were killed by Israeli rockets.

We requested the cooperation and support of *Gaza Community Mental Health Programme* to deal with this traumatic situation. The two librarians/facilitators and some of the young volunteer professionals attended a course that was structured "to give...basic tools that trainees need to know in order to address specific problems that children in Gaza have." It also pointed out the importance of parental attitudes, play therapy, and Bibliotherapy. The workshop included the following titles: Introduction to mental health; Child behavioral problems; Dealing with children in stressful condition; The effect of social rearing on children; Children and play; Children and reading.

Unfortunately Palestinians living in the Occupied West Bank cannot go to Gaza so our work there must be conducted by e-mail and telephone. Nevertheless, children and young people in Gaza have not lost hope. They still dream of peace and of a dignified life with no occupation or oppression. It was very touching that immediately after the war in Gaza we received numerous moving stories and drawings by children reflecting their agonies and dreams!



### **More News from PBBY**

The last few months witnessed a boost in PBBY activities mostly in cultural exchanges and writer's visits to Palestine.

### ***Gardens of Hope—Children Writings***

The great news is that the book on Gaza, *Gardens of Hope*, written by Palestinian children and youth came into life as a result of a fantastic cooperation with the newly established United Arab Emirates IBBY and Kalimat publishing House in al-Sharjah, in particular. The illustrations were solely by children from the Emirates. Publicity for the book states that "Children of Palestine write about Pain and Children of Emirates color Hope." The book, which is bi-lingual, was distributed without cost at the Book Fair when children bought the book of Fatima Sharafeddine, *If I were a Bird*, whose royalties support PBBY libraries in Gaza and the Children in Crisis Project. The beautiful book cover was illustrated by the Tunisian artist Ra'ouf al- Qurai who donated the art.

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## Visit of Three International Children Writers to Palestine.

### Canadian writer Anne Carter

In July 2009, along with the Tamer Institute, Anne Laurel Carter visited Ramallah to facilitate her fourth workshop with aspiring Palestinian writers from around the Occupied West Bank. Some participants have attended all of Anne's workshops since February of 2005 when the IBBY-Palestine president first invited Anne to Ramallah.

Anne says that "Modeling is the most powerful method of teaching," a technique she used in her training sessions. The participants witnessed first-hand Anne's process of researching and writing a novel about a Palestinian girl living under occupation. They learned that writing may begin with a story to tell, but that publication requires hard work and plenty of revision. PBBY invited Anne for a public lecture about the process of writing her book, *The Shepherd's Granddaughter*, which was launched at the new bookstore in Ramallah. Anne presented IBBY-Palestine with a donation for Children in Crisis in Gaza from the royalties of her book.

### Brazilian writer Luciana Savaget

At the beginning of October, Luciana arrived in Palestine with her sister for a short personal visit, her second visit to Palestine. Luciana managed to attend an activity with the Tamer Institute in a children's library in Nablus. Moreover, PBBY and the Tamer Institute jointly organized a lecture by Luciana about her book, *Rescue Mission in Baghdad*, which is translated into Arabic by the Tamer Institute. Dr Sharif Kanaana gave a critique of her book followed by an interesting discussion.

### America writer Elsa Marston

Elsa Marston arrived in the Palestinian Occupied Territory to participate in olive picking. From November 3<sup>rd</sup> until the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, she was the guest of PBBY where she implemented many activities in a few days. Elsa talked about her books and about writing stories for children and teaching creative writing. She discussed her books—primarily *Santa Claus in Baghdad*.

Elsa visited the Arab American University of Jenin and Birzeit University. She had meetings with teachers from the UNRWA and with teachers/librarian from the Ministry of Education, and read a short story to students in two UNRWA Schools in Jerusalem. In addition Elsa gave a very interesting short training to Palestinian writers. PBBY arranged for a public lecture entitled, "**More Than Just Stories: The Portrayal of Palestinians in American Children's Literature.**" Elsa's visit was very lively and interactive.

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