

Begegnung

Stiftung Deutsch-Palästinensisches Jugendwerk
الرابطه الفلسطينية الألمانية للتعاون الشبابي

Declaration of the Founders

Gütersloh, May 2004

For many years now we have been organizing encounters of young people from Palestine and Germany. We are:

- Teachers of the Anne-Frank-Comprehensive School in Gütersloh, who have been organizing exchange-programs with Palestinian and German students since 1998. Since 2002 our school has an official partnership with the Evan-Luth. School of Hope in Ramallah;
- the Association Project Friendship Birzeit – Münster e.V., which has been working with young people from Palestine and Germany for a long time;
- the Lutheran Community of Harsewinkel, which has been in touch with Palestinian parishes for many years;
- private persons from Gütersloh, who are vigorously and financially supporting this project.

Students and teachers of both countries, who took part in our projects so far, experienced these encounters represented as an enrichment of their lives.

Palestinians, who came to Gütersloh or Münster discovered new prospects and derived new hope for a peaceful future in Palestine. We are convinced: If young people from Palestine get the possibility to experience a life in peace and democracy, this will help to strengthen patterns of a civil society in their country.

On the other hand, these projects broaden the minds of young Germans with regard to their prosperous, democratic and peaceful reality they often take for granted. It may counteract their often lamented weariness of politics. The confrontation with the Palestinian culture and the reality of life in Palestine raises important questions with a new intensity.

The intention of our work is aptly described in the Deed of Partnership between the Anne-Frank-Schule (Gütersloh) and the School of Hope (Ramallah): "With the help of intercultural exchange and encounters, or students are going to find their own identity, learn to respect each other and to communicate peacefully and democratically. Their education and their experiences will become elements of peace and understanding between peoples."

Considering the aggravating situation in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, encounters between young people from Germany and Palestine are getting more and more important. Palestinian youngsters only know a life under occupation, a life as strangers in their own country. Their everyday life is determined by worry about the family and their financial future by humiliations at checkpoints and the difficulties of organizing life under the occupation. On their daily journey to school, to university, to the shops or to see friends and relatives they all get to know fear and danger of life. All of them have experienced shootings and the destructions of houses.

The psycho-social consequences of this state of emergency that has become their daily life, can be illustrated by a few keywords: Upset and traumatized children, Anxiety states and insomnia because of shootings at night and roaring tank tracks, motoric defects because of the lack of motion during the curfews, bottled up aggression because of the continuing daily humiliations and tension within the families. Every day teachers are confronted with this enormous pedagogic challenge, which is often superseding the real curriculum.

For the expert in peace and conflict research, Dr. Reiner Steinbach (Linz), politicians urgently have to start creating perspectives for young Palestinians: "The conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the central trouble spots of the world. It can only be civilised, if after fifty years, we finally succeed in creating civil perspectives, humane living conditions and self determination for young people in Palestine, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian population. In the absence of similar perspectives it is easy to throw away one's life and make oneself available for politically and humanly horrible suicide attacks. Human beings, who consider their life worth living, may not be immune to this danger, but they are certainly less susceptible to it. ... This task is primarily a German and European one, because the conflict in the Middle East

would not exist in the way it does today without the Holocaust, and European anti-Semitism, nationalism and colonialism. We'll have to make economic sacrifices to open a path towards education and resources for young Palestinians. However these will be negligible compared to those demanded, if the new kind of warfare starts to affect Europe too."

To counteract the growing hopelessness and the resulting readiness to use violence, it is getting increasingly important for Palestinian youngsters to escape their barely conceivable living conditions at least for a certain time and to derive new strength and hope for a better future from encounters with other young people.

The foundation "**Encounters. Foundation for German-Palestinian Youth Encounters**" will promote an extension of these German – Palestinian encounters to other schools, parishes and associations and guarantee a long-term financial security. This new and unique foundation wants to support in many ways projects, which promote the understanding between young Germans and Palestinians and dialogue, tolerance and peaceful and democratic relations between cultures.

The nation-wide foundation whose headquarters are in Gütersloh

- is a non-profit organization,
- is not connected to any political party, religious confession or ideology,
- initiates and supports encounters between young people from Palestine and Germany and partnerships between schools,
- promotes practical training and advances education for young people and specialists from Palestine,
- promotes stays of Palestinian students in German schools,
- organizes German-Palestinian exchange programs for teachers,
- attends and supports projects for new, intercultural encounters, which contribute to the building of a civil and democratic society,
- supports the foundation of projects and institutions for development aid in Palestine,
- produces didactic material and promotes seminars, conferences and exhibitions,
- promotes the networking of associations, institutions and initiatives organizing German-Palestinian encounters (extract from the statutes and articles).

Apart from the necessary immediate help for the suffering, particularly in the Middle East it is important to show staying power. With our promotion of long-term educational work we want to accompany the many projects for improvement and help in Palestine.

To be able to support and attend as many German-Palestinian projects as possible on a nation-wide base, we have to substantially increase our endowment funds, because the foundation will essentially work only with the interests of the capital endowed. We are confidently hoping for the German citizens to idealistically, actively and financially support the Foundation Encounters and to spread the knowledge of our Foundation.

We can only exist through a network of supporters and the active cooperation of many people, institutions and groups.

If you want to support „**Encounters. Foundation for German-Palestinian Encounters**“ financially, you may send us a donation or contribute to the endowment fund. Any donation will be used for statutory objects only. Contributions to the endowment fund increase the capital stock and are not drawn on. Their interests are used according to the objects of the Foundation. If you want to make a donation or contribute to the fund, please send your full name and address, so that we can send you a receipt.

Bank connection: Sparkasse Gütersloh, IBAN: DE82 4785 0065 0000 0588 93, BIC: WELADED1GTL, BCN 478 500 65, Account No. 58893

The Founders

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