



Annual Report 2018





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WHO WE ARE

We are open minded.

We are based on human rights.
We are both Palestinians and Danish.
We are committed to making a difference

We - The Danish House in Palestine – including our staff, partners, volunteers, project participants, supporters, board and guests are all a combination of both Palestine and Denmark, women and men, young and older.

We are an independent, non-political, human rights-based organization based in Ramallah, working all over the West Bank and in East-Jerusalem.

We are a transparent entity, always open to changes, improvements and new projects. We ask our partners, supporters and all others to hold The Danish House accountable to its vision, mission and business practices. We expect all our projects to be based on equality - and to be sustainable in ways that allow our projects to continue beyond our involvement.

Vision

The Danish House in Palestine's vision of is to strenghten mutual understanding and appreciation between Danish and Palestinian cultures, as well as encourage the values of an open, tolerant, and democratic society.

Mission

The Danish House in Palestine's mission is to create and develop opportunities for cultural and educational exchange and cooperation between Danes and Palestinians on individual and institutional levels.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

I have been strolling through the last eight years of annual reports of The Danish House in Palestine. It is an inspirational journey through music, literature, theatre, film, circus, sports, photography and journalism. It is an account of strong relations between Palestine and Denmark and of mutual professional learning.

It is all about the freedom of expression.

For more than fifty years, Palestinians have lived under military occupation. The entire Palestinian population is fragmented not only by a wall, but also socially and culturally by decades of displacement. To us, freedom of expression is an imperative to bring about positive change, to keep hope alive, and to be seen and recognized as an individual and as a population in its own right.

After six months at the Danish House, it is obvious to me that we, together with our partners, are providing relevant opportunities where Palestinians together with Danes can explore, reflect on and continuously renew and unfold their cultural identity and heritage. This is a value in itself.

The joint productions and cultural encounters also offer a storyline far beyond the stereotypes of Palestine reflected in the media. We insist on telling that story, and we insist on bringing people together. Over the years, the Danish House has therefore welcomed tens of thousands at our in-house events plus hundreds of Danish visitors and Danish volunteers. Our many Danish guests

and supporters have left the West Bank impressed by the steadfastness of Palestinian people, moved and often enriched with new perspectives on Palestine.

The year of 2018 has been all this.

It was a year where the violence escalated, and the idea of peace once again became a hazy dream.

At the Danish House we have worked with numerous projects covering a big variety of literature, theatre, film, circus, boxing, photography and journalism. We have welcomed Danes, new volunteers and interns. We made a grand push on our social media, generating even more followers. And we deepened our relations and made choices for the future.

In 2019, we will continue to provide diverse opportunities for normative dialogues, engagements and artistic expressions. Together with existing as well as new partners, ideas will be unfolded, altered and perhaps trashed. We will push for quality, co-creation and for joint productions between artists, cultural practitioners and experts from Palestine and Denmark.

We will continue to prioritize freedom of speech through our collaboration with media institutions.

We will promote inclusivity and encourage cultural participation through a cluster of projects with the working title '*Children, Young People, Learning and Creativity*'. It is about empowerment, cultural participation and creative citizenship contributing to building bigger, more diverse and more committed audiences as well as enabling a widely-engaged and diverse community of future artists and cultural practitioners.

With the present annual report, we have given the word to the circus directors, the lawyer who created a boxing academy and the artist with his paintings of the women, the villages and the lost fields.

Helle Schierbeck
Director



HEARTS & MINDS

– this is how we communicate

Nothing is more important than facts. But feelings are also important.

To understand Palestine, you must know the facts, and you must know how people feel - it is not either or, you need both hearts and minds to grasp reality as it is.

Our communication profile in The Danish House in Palestine has changed.

We focus more on storytelling. We strive to communicate about our projects, what we do, and who and what we meet out there - in real life - with a more journalistic, lively, close-to-people approach.

Any day, on any occasion, go to our digital platforms – mainly our social media, Facebook and Instagram – and our ambition is that you will find informative, creative, inspiring vitamins about Palestine, Denmark, the Arab world or a beautiful mix of all our similarities and differences.

We have boosted and re-equipped our capacity to communicate on several fronts.

Above all, we do a lot of “Colour TV”. We produce documentaries and mini-reportages with the ambition that an even larger audience can see and feel the land and the people, and in this way contribute to our essential vision of enhancing mutual dialogue and understanding

We do not always follow the stream; sometimes we rather aspire to be the stream.

between Palestine, the Arab World, and Denmark.

On a daily basis we report on our projects, current affairs and daily life – always including video, photos, texts, whatever format we believe is right to tell you *the story*.

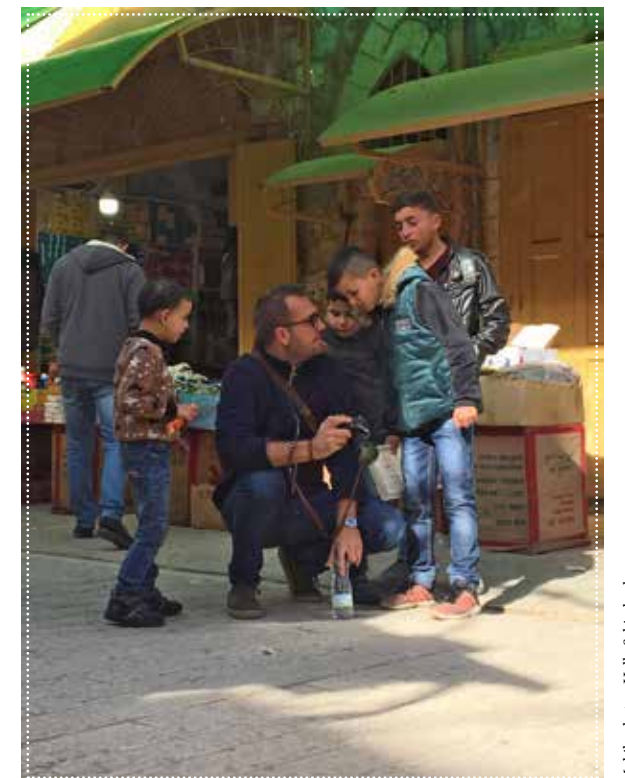
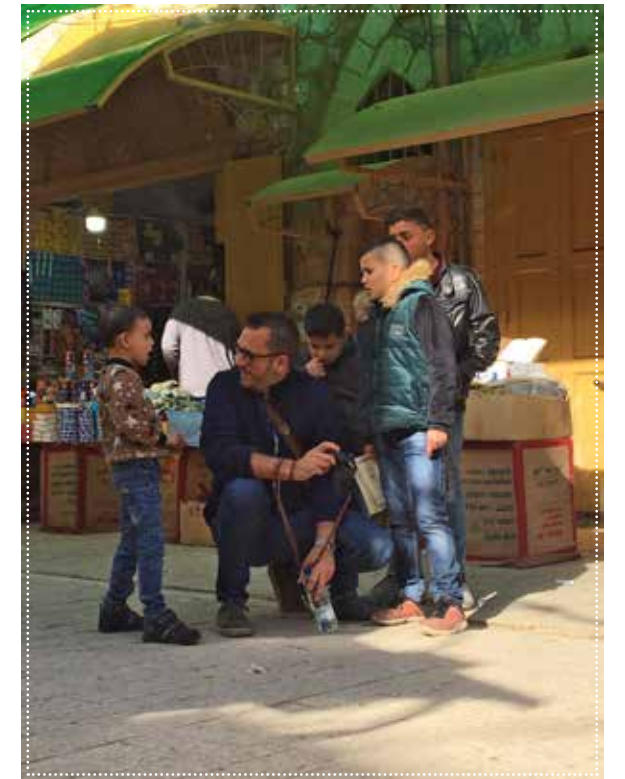
We wish to engage all of you: Our partners, supporters, media, decisions-makers, friends, and new visitors, young and old, Palestinian and Danish, the public – by speaking with a clear voice, and by keeping basic Human Rights and democratic, open-minded values at the core of our work and how we present both facts and feelings to the world around us.

We hope that you will follow our ever-growing “family” on Facebook and Instagram, and visit our very own TV-channel on YouTube where we offer a full collection of all of our TV-productions.

The (media) world is changing all the time, and so is our communication. We do not always follow the stream; sometimes we rather aspire to be the stream.

Join our communication – and we will do our very best to feed both hearts and minds, to #makeadifference.

Jeppe Nybroe
Communication Manager



Mobile photos: Helle Schierbeck

& PROJECTS THE PEOPLE

Basic Human Rights are always key to all our work, including all our projects with Palestinian and Danish partners. Democracy, gender equality, freedom of expression, and free media are the foundation of both our general principles and daily work – while at the same time promoting and enhancing dialogue and more understanding between Palestine, the Arab World, and Denmark.

Our projects are mainly based on culture, art, and media. In 2018, as well as in the past years since The Danish House in Palestine was created back in 2010, we have aimed at supporting and engaging in a very diverse portfolio of projects:

Circus schools in Palestine and Denmark - supporting The Palestinian Circus School and Circus Tvaers build further awareness around the concept of social circus as well as strengthen the learning between the two organisations; **Bir Zeit University Media Development Center and International Media Support, Investigative Journalism** - training Palestinian journalists from local media houses in investigative journalistic skills, including workshops on research, code of journalism ethics and conduct, production and distribution +10 powerful, in-depth journalistic stories. **ElBarrio Gym in Palestine exchanging athletes** with Vollsmose Boxing in Denmark - developing a Palestinian-Danish sports partnership with the ambition to create visibility and awareness on boxing in Palestine, and further to influence the perceptions of Palestine in Denmark; **When Past Meets Future** – bringing Palestinian traditional music into the contemporary international art and music scene; **Tamer Institute for Community Education and Danish publishers, Youth Literature & Illustration** -

promoting the literary culture of Palestine, and introducing young readers in Palestine to illustrated novels; Palestinian academic institutions and Danish academia - sharing and introducing alternative approaches to historic research and writing i.e. the Palestinian history and heritage from a non-biblical perspective as compared to religion-based interpretation of Palestine history; **Filmlab Palestine, Palestine Cinema Days, Film Literacy and Empowering Storytellers** – celebrating the world cinema, deepening the appreciation of film culture, as well as connecting Palestinian and international film professionals and thereby fostering a local film industry. **Al Harah Theatre in Palestine and Opgang 2, Theatre for Youth in Denmark** - introducing children and young people to alternative theatre and themes, which in the Palestinian context are not traditionally and openly discussed such as adulthood, sexuality, friendship, choices in life etc. This year the project involved two tours, one in Palestine and one in Denmark. **Safar Theater and Organic Farming** - building more awareness towards natural farming through innovative methods based on theatre and recycling, encouraging and strengthening young people's connection to the land and agriculture. **International Media Support and Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute, Photo Marathon** - creating an opportunity for amateurs and professionals to engage creatively with photography. This year, the Marathon was conducted in Copenhagen, Ramallah and Cairo simultaneously, and was concluded with three exhibitions. **Palestinian Performing Arts Network – Cultural Criticism** - raising awareness on cultural reporting and criticism among journalists, media practitioners, and media outlets.

In the following pages you will find articles and interviews with some of our key partners and collaborators – giving them a voice in this annual report to express their ambitions and dreams, and hereby also giving us an insight into what a difference The Danish House in Palestine makes to the people involved.

Above all, what makes a difference to our projects and us is the people.

The voice of the voiceless

Freedom of speech is on the decline in Palestine. The press is under more pressure than it has been in twenty years. Furthermore, most media organizations are affiliated with political parties, business and religious interests. However, there are a few bastions of independent journalism fighting. One of them is Wattan TV.

In a region where disunity is the name of the game and it is sometimes harder to find two people in power who agrees than it is to find a calm driver, Wattan TV has managed something quite extraordinary; to get Hamas, The Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel to have a common interest: Making life hard for Wattan TV.

"They have all tried to create obstacles for us. Our journalists have a hard time working in and getting access to Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas. Israel has confiscated our equipment twice, and the PA has closed us five times. But we continue, and I as I told my colleague, when all of these authorities gets more angry with us, this means that we are on the right track. We are doing a good job," says Wattan TV' General Director, Muamar Orabi.

It all fits into a story that the editor of sixteen years has been telling for some time. The free press in Palestine is fighting more than it has in two decades.

"Freedom of speech is on the way back in Palestine. It is worse than it was 22 years ago when Wattan TV was founded. The whole atmosphere is charged at the moment, everything is sensitive. But that is why we need independence and secular media like Wattan – we just need more of it."

Wattan, which means homeland, was founded in 1996 in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords. Suddenly, the press was set free in an unprecedented way, an opportunity that was used in short order. Wattan was established as a secular and independent news organiza-



tion, which it takes great pride in still being today.

Investigative journalism is at the center of what is being done at Wattan. Stories are uncovered and told to the public – stories about everything from corruption to abuse of women. No authority is left unchecked, be it Palestinian or Israeli. Muamar Orabi, the one-time lawyer turned editor, explains:

Changing media landscape

"We have been to the courts many times, because the officials are deeply troubled by our reports, where we discuss corruption, mismanagement and other bad things that the politicians don't want out in the public. We tell stories about women, youth, minorities and other marginalized groups in our society.

Our slogan is 'The voice of the voiceless'."

During the last few years the outlook and outlets of the Palestinian media landscape, and the rest of the world, has changed. The introduction of social media in the news stream has radically altered the way modern media operates. Wattan is no exception - they were even early movers.

"I attended lessons in Germany back in 2005, where I learned about social media and Web-TV. I wanted to implement these ideas immediately in Palestine, but it wasn't possible until 2010 when the connections got good enough. But then we also launched", says Muamar Orabi.

Today, Wattan finds its largest audience on Facebook where they have more than three

million followers. Additionally, the YouTube-channel has had more than 30 millions unique views since its inception seven years ago – corresponding to more than four million views each year. As a result they have made the decision to make all their productions, programs and news pieces available online.

The vast majority of Palestinians are active on social media, especially Facebook. According to a report on Palestinians' use of internet and social media, nearly four million Palestinians (2017) have private internet, accessing social media, mainly Facebook, via smartphones. Furthermore, explains Muamar Orabi, 70 % of all Palestinians get their news from social media, a number that is even higher among the youth whom Wattan are particularly aiming to attract.

The popularity can be explained by two factors, 42-years old Muamar Orabi says.

"First, it is very cheap to use social media. So, if we look at remote and marginalized areas, especially Gaza, they are dependent on social media to get their news. Second, because we in Palestine are suffering, and have been for a long time, from governmental- and affiliated media. The polarization in Palestine is not only political, but also exists in the media world. There are media for Hamas, for PA and so on. So people feel that social media gives them an alternative way to express themselves. They can be their own media outlets."

Using social media as the main way of dispersing their stories also grants Wattan one

other advantage. While their main audiences are Palestinians living in Palestine, the growing diaspora around the world also follows the news from the homeland closely. Wattan even has a sizeable contingent of Palestinians following them on Facebook and the website in Copenhagen.

Projects with the Danish House

Wattan is especially focused on a branch of journalism that historically has not had a big presence in Palestine; investigative journalism. Wattan is hoping to change that - with support from The Danish House in Palestine. To achieve this, The Danish House teamed up with International Media Support (IMS) and Birzeit University in 2018 to create a training program for

10 journalist, who would be taught investigative journalism skills by experienced Danish journalists. The 10 trainees were tasked with finding, researching, and communicating their own story. Wattan participated and at the end of the project their journalist, Hamza Al-Saleymah, won the prize for best story. Muamar Orabi wholeheartedly supports more of these initiatives:

"These projects are very important, because the Palestinian media needs this kind of training in how to produce investigative journalism. We need more projects in the future, so more outlets can learn how to work in a systematic way, because the Palestinian people need these kinds of news. The lack of investigative journalism means that most stories have been focused on the occupation and not on the ineffectiveness and corruption of the PA and other authorities."

There is though, according to Muamar Orabi, an appetite among the population for news

about their own authorities and what they are doing.

"The good thing about the project was that the training wasn't only theoretical – they learned in the field and gained valuable practical experience."

The journalists participating in the project learned how to research a story, how to find and use sources and overall ethics of journalism, all of which are needed to enhance the credibility of a story and the organization as a whole. Furthermore, they were taught how to produce a story after gathering all their research.

As an organization based on the principles of Human Rights - chief among them freedom of speech - The Danish House is planning on increasing its activities and projects that deal with journalism. Even though, in Muamar Orabi's eyes, things are going the wrong way at the moment, he refuses to give up hope. He says, only half-jokingly, that he has forbidden his employees to be depressed and reminds them that they are fighting for a new Palestine, a better Palestine, to leave their children.

He calls himself an optimist, because, as he says with a grin:

"It is the only option I have."



“Our values will spread like a snowball-effect”

Girls and boys in many areas of Palestine are not equal, small kids can not even touch each other while playing – but when they arrive to The Palestinian Circus School, all are equal. Human Rights are the core values of everything the circus-people do, also in their home communities: “When something wrong happens in the streets, like a girl being harassed, one of our students would point out that this is wrong, this should not happen.”

He oozes strong values, but dresses with a soft tone. For only a few months, Mohammad Rabah has been the top leader of one of Palestine’s most socially progressive schools. His strategy is to inspire the creation of circus schools all over Palestine, including more religious, political and social conservative communities. He is line-dancing all the minefields of a still conservative country, while at the same time gently pushing his vision to fight oppression in Palestine and beyond.

“I am not sure changing Palestine and Palestinians is our aim, for me it is a more universal human cause. I believe we live in a very connected globe and there is oppression everywhere in the world in different styles and shapes. Here it is very clear with military forces oppressing Palestinian people, with limitations on our freedom and movements, with a very aggressive military machine killing the people. But it comes in different shapes

in Denmark, Germany and in Africa,” the newly appointed director of The Palestinian Circus School, Mohammad Rabah, says, adding:

“We want to fight the oppression, we do not want to change Palestine” – with his somewhat emblematic facial expression of smiling with seriousness.

Some people outside the circus tent might say, why fool around in a circus, when you could go to the streets and make an intifida?

“We are not against people’s choices, people are free to choose whatever tool they want to resist or change their reality with. We are just giving them an alternative means to express themselves. And our tools come with many things: It will help you to develop and flourish, and also to have progressive values.”

Again, a voice of tolerance – not to enforce, but merely to “help you to have progressive values.” This attitude also



“ When I was a student I was not allowed to ask many kinds of questions: It was either ‘haram’ (forbidden, taboo), very political or against the society. But here in circus we try to allow people to ask any question.”



"For the future, when there are any progressive movements, being feminism or politics, our students or the people they have affected will be part of the progressive movements and maybe leading it."

embodies Mohammad Rabah's vision: To fight oppression.

But how can you fight oppression with circus, juggling and clowning around?

"Jumping the trampoline and juggling is very playful for young people and the children, but then come the critical questions of how I can express myself about really serious topics to send a message? How can jumping the trampoline and making this specific flip express something? Participants must focus more on how you need to work as a collective – from there they trust and believe in other people. This is a core issue to fight oppression, to feel connected with other people and thus be stronger and much more powerful together.

After a training where you have built the trust, maybe you can discuss a political issue, you can ask questions, and asking questions is very important. Unfortunately a lot of other spaces are putting a lot of limitations and challenges for young people asking questions."

In which ways?

"For example in the schools there is a hierarchy between you and your teacher. When I was a student, I was not allowed to ask many kinds of questions: It was either 'haram' (forbidden, taboo), very political or against the society. But here (in circus) we try to allow people to ask any question. What is known about children is that they are very keen to learn and asking questions is the first step to learning."

Mohammad Rabah, 32 years old, recently finished a masters degree in the UK about developing young people within communities, having worked with both local and international youth projects, in Palestine and Europe since his early twenties. Though his ways of talking resembles those of

a diplomat, he keeps repeating strong words about "fighting" and "oppression" – but always with a door open. And this open-door-open-mind-policy is also part of the new director's future vision: fighting oppression, and doing so also by spreading the values of The Palestinian Circus School to new circus clubs all over Palestine:

"Each community has its own context, and each (circus) group has its own way of working, and this is a very challenging job for both (our) trainers and performers.

My vision is to to be very close to the people, to do more street circus art where we can interact with the local community, and to have more circus clubs that are totally independent from the school, allowing them to lead, make mistakes and flourish, because we can not reach all the communities alone."

So that circus school is not only based in Birzeit, Ramallah, but also in Hebron, Nablus, Jenin...

"My aim is not to focus on The Palestinian Circus School, but on our impact. It does not matter if a circus club in Jenin or Tulkarem has a different name or is governed by another organization, as long as they use the values and methods that are agreed with The Palestinian Circus School.

We need to decentralize the leadership giving to different communities the ability to shape how, and by who, trainings will be done, how much do the students need to pay as fees to the school, what materials or special circus arts do we want, are we mixing girls and boys – my vision is to allow the local clubs to decide all such decisions.

They do not have to pay us any money, on the contrary we will try to support them financially,

and hope one day they will be completely independent.

If you go support circus clubs all over the West Bank, should they also comply with what you believe in, your values, human rights?

"We will try...this is the core issue for us, that these clubs comply with our values and human rights, basically. We will try to have a dialogue and not a top-down approach, so we will try to explain why we believe in these values and then reach an agreement. You must have equality among genders, (yet) we understand the context (of certain communities).

But, if you keep encouraging inequality, you will face these problems in the future. So, we will have this learning process of values with each community, and then they will decide what is best for them, or maybe have a strategy on how to introduce those values long term.

That is what we did with clubs we have worked with so far, we did not enforce our values on these communities but instead encouraged them to engage with these values through dialogue."

So, open mind, open doors – to a certain limit, and the limits being respect of basic human rights:





"For example, if you have a sexual orientation you will be judged in many places in the world. It is difficult to work with these topics, but we are not here to discuss it, we want people with different sexual identities to be treated with respect and equality in the tent, in the performances, in the whole school – and the same if you have a different religion or colour of your skin. These are the values that we want to promote."

And exactly here, from Human Rights covering all Palestine like a blanket of snow, he truly believes and encourages that the circus school values could spread like a snowball rolling down a hill, getting bigger and bigger:

"We work on an individual level, and we believe that if we have a good impact on one person, then from there hopefully it will spread, go to the social- and hopefully also political levels outside. So, for the future, when there are any progressive movements, being feminism or politics, our students or the people they have affected will be part of the progressive movements and maybe leading it."

Circus school director Mohammad Rabah expresses "human capacity" and "funding" as the main challenges for the future of The Palestinian Circus School, founded some 12

years ago. He is always searching for the right people in his quest to make the school more financially independent from local as well as international donors, among those The Danish House in Palestine which in effect these days means the Danish State.

In which ways does the cooperation with The Danish House make a difference for The Palestinian Circus School?

"(Our circus) is allowing people from Denmark and Palestine to feel how connected the world we live in is. This intercultural and human connection, to find people in Palestine who believe in the same human rights as in Denmark, work in circus or performing together, that is a very important dimension for us. And from what I heard and read, that is also a very important issue for The Danish House. I hope we can bring this local impact to a global impact, even in very small groups I think we can grow and fight xenophobia, localism and individualism in both Denmark and Palestine."

In 2019, again the circus will be all over Palestine – and also planning for performances with their circus friends in Denmark. And with several new local circus clubs. The snowball is rolling.

Our Volunteers

1 Christian Ravnsbæk Jacobsen, Nurse, 26 years

My biggest contribution was a different view on the health sector. For the Palestinians, though, the most important thing was, that we got to witness their culture so it wouldn't get lost in the conflict

My recommendation is to be open and don't be afraid to go - no matter what you see on the TV. It is not dangerous to be there and The Danish House takes good care of you

My biggest success was the Palestinians! Their culture and way of doing things is something I brought home with me. To live in the moment and appreciate what you have is something many in Denmark should learn.

2 Signe Von, Nurse, 27 years

Remember to be patient! Even though The Danish House has taken care of anything, at the hospital it still might be chaotic. You also get an opportunity to influence your stay - which is good

My biggest success was making a difference for the children and their parents at the hospital. A boy who got checked out brought his grandmother, who hugged and kissed me. At that moment, I felt, I was making a difference

The biggest challenge was the language, even though many of the personnel spoke English, it could be hard to communicate with the patients. Furthermore, I often felt in over my head at the hospital, where I was asked to do things, I didn't feel ready for.

3 Victoria Dettmann, Nurse, 24 years

My biggest successes were getting to visit all the local bedouins and the refugee camps, hearing so many personal stories, which really expanded my perspective

Remember to be open, smiling, positive, and flexible. You are not back in Denmark, so adjust your expectations accordingly.



Join our volunteer program - facts:

- In 2018, The Danish House in Palestine supported 33 Danish volunteers working in various fields all over the West Bank.
- Our volunteers work from North to South, in Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, East Jerusalem, Hebron - and other areas where there is a need.
- We can fit your volunteer job to most fields. Often our Danish volunteers are students and they come to work in health care, in journalism, supporting children and youth, human rights - and more.
- Contact us for more information: volunteer@dhip.ps



Boxing for Our Land

A Palestinian boxer at the Olympics. That is the simple, but daunting, goal of ElBarrio. While trying to achieve that goal the gym is also fostering the next generation of kids continuing a seven decades-long struggle and fighting for the recognition of Palestine.

“BOX!” The command, said with authority, isn’t shouted – but is nevertheless heard by everybody. It sounds more at home in the military than it does here in a small gym in the industrial area of Beitunia, Ramallah, but the effect is instantaneous. A dozen kids standing in a loose semi-circle begin shadow-boxing. One step forward, jab. One step to the side followed by a well-rehearsed left-right combination. It’s a dance meant to help dodge and give the optimal angle to knock-out your opponent.

Walking among the kids is 31-year-old Nader Jayousi. He is correcting stances, footwork, boxing combinations and urging the kids on, pushing, always wanting them to go further. Suddenly he straightens his back and issues another command.

“BREAK!” We find ourselves in ElBarrio – meaning neighborhood in Spanish – a gym founded by Nader Jayousi in 2015. The former boxer turned coach quit his fulltime job as a lawyer – giving up a secure and quite profitable future – to follow his passion. Coaching and giving kids the opportunity he never had himself.

“I knew from the beginning that I couldn’t go into this project halfheartedly, I had to invest my blood and soul and maximize what I was doing.”

What today is ElBarrio was just an empty room four years ago. Nader Jayousi, whose wife also works in the gym as a trainer, and his friends build everything with their own hands. Not only as a way to save money, but also to show the commitment and dedication to the project.

Olympics and Palestine

The ultimate goal of ElBarrio is simple. Getting a Palestinian boxer to the Olympics. It might provoke incredulity, and indeed it does to many people, but for Nader Jayousi it isn’t just a dream or impossible ambition to chase. It is inevitable.

“It is doable, for sure. A hundred percent. And I am very comfortable with the thought that it will take time, but we will get there eventually. I enjoy seeing the kids grow and being responsible for what they do. And I enjoy seeing them being loyal to ElBarrio and

see that they want to represent the country and the flag. So we enjoy the journey. We have time. That is why I started young.”

It is one of the differences that ElBarrio is making. The boxers in ElBarrio aren’t just fighting for themselves or the gym. They are fighting for Palestine. Every time they travel abroad they proudly carry with them the flag and the knowledge, which has been drilled into their consciousness by Nader Jayousi, that they are representing Palestine.

“I come from a family of freedom fighters, I’m very proud of this and I say it everywhere I go around the world. My family fought for the country and now I’m doing the same. In my own way.

He says he would have done the same as his father and uncles did, if he was from that time. But times have changed.

“Even my dad understands that. My dad, who got wounded in six different places in his body, and was hit by a missile shot, he understands. He tells me that what we are doing in sports is what they did back on the battlefield. The whole fighting, armed resistance, it is not the time anymore. Now it is the time to make everybody recognize the country by using things you can control.”

His father was injured in Lebanon while fighting for the PLO against the invasion and to this day he still has a cut on his head from missile shrapnel. Now, Nader is passing the passion, the fight for recognition, on to the next generation.

“When we travel abroad we are turning kids, some who have had their sandwiches wrapped by their parents, into kids who carries 70 years of resistance to the whole world. These kids can’t be cowards, can’t be scared.”

The Danish House supported-neighborhood hangout that ElBarrio has become is open to anyone. Getting the coaching and training is expensive – nearly 200 Shekel a month -, which is why Nader Jayousi has created a board, which every six months handpicks kids from families, who otherwise couldn’t afford a membership, and lets them join the training

for a minimal amount of money.

When they get there, they are the same as everyone else. Poor or rich, girl or boy, tall or short, old or young – it doesn’t make a difference. Everyone is treated equally.

“We have a code in ElBarrio that everyone follows. No exceptions. I don’t care about your background. I am the coach and you are the student. I am old school that way.”

But the gym is more than a gym. It is a safe place, a hangout for the kids after school. They talk, laugh, play and support each other when one of them is going through a hard time.

“Most of them are making a home at ElBarrio. They really feel at home here. Even when they can’t train, because of injury, exam or something, they will still come here and hang out with the other kids. They will come and motivate their friends and help me. It is a home for them, they come and hangout and they love it. They feel comfortable here.”

The Danish House has been working together with ElBarrio since 2016. A cooperation that has led to, among other things, an exchange of boxers between ElBarrio, Ramallah and Vollsmose Boxing in Odense, Denmark.

Nader Jayousi has managed to keep others away from ElBarrio. The Danish House, though, he let in. And there is a very specific reason for that.

“The whole fighting, armed resistance, it is not the time anymore. Now it is the time to make everybody recognize the country by using things you can control.”

“The project we have with the Danish House is extremely important. We treat it like it is gold for us, because we have somebody who respects us, who respect our concept, who respect the way we think, who is not coming to apply their own agenda and trying to teach us how to talk to our kids. They are coming here to say, that we respect what you do. What do you need, and how can we help.”

Furthermore, the Danish House has given ElBarrio something else that no amount of money could buy, credibility.

“They vouched for ElBarrio in front of everybody. I don’t really care about other people so much, but I care about my kids at the gym, and they feel so appreciated by this. It gives them, and I am a coach and I see it in the training-sessions, so much confidence.”

The Danish House has become part of something bigger.

“The Danish House made the kids feel like there are more people that care about what they do and appreciate it. The kids are always talking about the other kids and coaches in Vollsmose, they are communicating with them on Facebook. So I am telling you, it makes them feel like they are part of something great, because, they say, this gym takes care of us, this place was good enough for the Danish House to come and sit with us.”



Events

- many happy highlights in The Danish House...

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2018: That's What Friends Are For They steal, lie and almost die, yet, their friendship saves them. The theatre play "4 EVER" touring Denmark - after a unique tour visiting schools and refugee camps all over the West Bank. A one hour, and one actor play that won the most prestigious theatre prize in Denmark, a 'Reumert'. "4 EVER" is created by OP-GANG2 TURNÉTEATER from Aarhus, Denmark, and supported by The Danish House in Palestine.

OCTOBER 2018: Need to publish the secret news of Palestine Toxic medical waste from hospitals harming children and nature - selling of illegal slimming pills - fathers beating up their daughters with no judicial punishment. All hard news uncovered during the past year by Palestinian journalists, after special training in investigative journalism at Birzeit University's Media Development Center supported by International Media Support, The Danish Representation in Ramallah and The Danish House in Palestine. "If we do not improve our freedom of press, we can never improve Palestinian democracy. We must do better," as one local journalist in the audience said.

SEPTEMBER 2018: Hit the road, girls! Young and powerful Palestinian women (and some guys) challenging cultural, religious, sexual, and social barriers. By encouraging all people, girls and boys, young and old, to bicycle in everyday life of Palestine - like in Denmark - and hereby also peacefully pushing for (more) freedom of movement. Hosted by Ramallah Municipality, and joined by our finance officer Niveen, intern Rasmus, director Helle and communication manager Jeppe.

DECEMBER 2018: Bilal & The Stream This is not a Christmas fairy tale. But it is somewhat a Palestinian love story about missing the family, the people and the land that you love. We fol-

lowed our Danish-Palestinian board member Bilal as he went on a private mission of healing - with special moments of wellness - revisiting the village from which his grandfather was expelled by the Israeli army in 1948. Watch the film on our Facebook or our YouTube TV channel.

OCTOBER 2018: Naela's Love ♥ It's an everyday routine, our housekeeper Naela makes traditional Palestinian lunch to all the staff - including her own, homemade olive oil. In October, director Helle and communication manager Jeppe joined Naela and her family for the olive harvest. "The trees are my family, together with my sons. My husband, he died some years ago, but I still have my sons. And my trees..." Naela says.

DECEMBER 2018: Meeting "Picasso of Palestine" The world famous Palestinian artist Nabil Anani, reaches out to your mind and your heart, during a 2-hour long interview

and Q & A in front of the audience in The Danish House. 75 years old, lifelong experience, he shares strong, surprising and often humorous opinions on art, culture, and life in his beloved homeland. At the same time we released a 35 minutes documentary - produced by The Danish House in Palestine - from inside his home and private studio in Ramallah.

NOVEMBER 2018: Girls are kicking balls in Palestine - like never before! Female football players trained by a young Danish journalist and coach, mr. Mikkel Harbo Moustén, 28 years with high ambitions: Building an all female Palestinian Football League. In front of an enthusiastic crowd of both male and female, ms. Ghadeer L. Ladaa, 28 years, former captain of the National Palestinian Football Team, sharing her passion and all the tough challenges of being a woman who simply loves playing football

APRIL 2018: World Wide Photo Marathon In collaboration together with and alongside in Denmark, the West Bank and Egypt, we invited young Palestinians for a photo marathon. As-

signed with different themes, the young photographers were sent into the field - afterwards exhibiting the photos in The Danish House, Cairo and Copenhagen.

MAY & DECEMBER 2018: Iftar, goodbye and good luck All the office in May celebrating together Iftar during the Ramadan, joining for dinner - at the same time saying goodbye and good luck to previous communication manager, mr. Mads Mariegaard. In December, we were celebrating Christmas with hot chocolate and program officer Doha's homemade pancakes.

NOVEMBER 2018: Two-wheeled Freedom of Movement Bicycling, a taboo, low status, impossible in Palestine? Ever more Palestinians are taking a bike, escaping heavy traffic, exploring nature, and enjoying freedom - breaking down taboos and other barriers. Mohammad W. Zarour, one of the frontriders for a two-wheeled Palestinian "revolution" and founder of Palestine Riders - دراجو فلسطين - joined us to share to an energetic cox-talk audience his advice, vision and love of bicycling.

Picasso of Palestine

meet Nabil Anani

An exclusive interview and a new documentary with the famous Palestinian artist Nabil Anani, explaining, through his eyes, how old, religious, and conservative thinking suffocate art in the Arab world.

"Culture must always lead the people in politics, in thinking, in everything; but, I am sorry, because culture does not affect people enough here. Not only here in Palestine, but all over the Arab world. You know, we have many things from the past that stop us from thinking, or thinking more, like religion, old heritage..." Nabil Anani says, then pause, before continuing his criticism of weaknesses – or the challenges - of art and culture in the Arab world.

Nabil Anani is 75 years old, and he laughs like a schoolboy. He oozes of being present - and of being 'Palestinian' with capital letters. His opinions are direct, maybe even daring. At the same time he is a soft-spoken gentleman who, on various levels, embodies major parts of the most painful sides of the Palestinians' history: he was born in 1943, a few years before the creation of Israel and The Nakba, and was raised in the village of Halhul next to Hebron. Every day he fights the occupation through his art, finding new, subtle ways of joining the past intifadas through his brushes, colours, and canvases.

"When you live in Palestine, as an artist, you must reflect the situation, the people, the suffering

in your art. Some artists paint only like an insect - let us say a mosquito - and then present it as art. In my eyes, you can not as a Palestinian artist do this. The mosquito needs to have a meaning; you can not just exclude and forget about the real life, because the occupation is surrounding us in every bit of daily life."

Like many other Palestinians, Nabil and his family have their own stories of suffering in daily life, like struggling to travel through checkpoints, and Israeli soldiers invading their streets. And yet, beneath the darker strokes of his paintings, one finds a very humoristic, open-minded, liberal artist.

When you walk into Nabil Anani's home in Ramallah, he walks straight into your heart. On the very first meeting and beyond there is no fanciness, no pretention, no nonsense, just warmth.

Rumbling Laughter

"Welcome! I am happy to see you. Coffee, tea, water, something to eat?"

Nabil's art is world famous - some paintings are sold for six-digit figures - yet "selling, prices, it does not interest me. It is nice but it is not my world, not my focus".

From the first moment your eyes meet with his, he listens carefully.

"Try this!" he urges, with a sparkling look at his wife as she serves us fresh bread with zaatar-zeit, sitting in the family kitchen, the traditional bread still warm and crispy from her oven. Soon after we sneak out, "I need to smoke", says Nabil with the expression of a slightly naughty boy. Inside the living room, smoking is no more appreciated by Mrs. Anani, so we go to her husband's studio in the basement of their home.

Around us in the studio are messy shelves and several tables with hundreds of paint tubes, a forest of brushes, all surfaces with their own landscape of dust and trash, and stacks of pipe tobacco cans, all empty. "I really love this specific type of tobacco, I think it has a good taste of whisky, but I can't get it here in Palestine, only when someone brings me from the outside," Nabil says.

American BBQ-sauce and Japanese soy sauce, familiar bottles from the kitchen, stand out in Anani's studio in between the ordinary working tools of an artist.

"I use BBQ-sauce in my art, it's good for my paper work. Also soy sauce. Sometimes medicine. And red wine!" says Nabil, the boyish laughter cracking on his face. For a moment, his eyes are teasing me; he's kidding, right?

"I'm serious," he laughs out loud. "It is amazing what stuff from the kitchen can do in mixing all new colours, or how things changes when adding some spray from cleaning (detergents). I also put medicine into the paint, it does magic." Now, not only eyes and mouth, but also his whole body, are shaking from laughter.

"Why not? I am like that, I must experiment, I must explore new ways of art and expressing myself, it has always been like this for me."

Eating Art

As one of Nabil's many anecdotes from a long life, the story goes that some years ago, a German woman bought an original Anani – no need to say the exact price, since it really does not have the interest of the artist, but at a nice (high) price. Shortly after bringing the piece home, the buyer called the 'Picasso of Palestine':

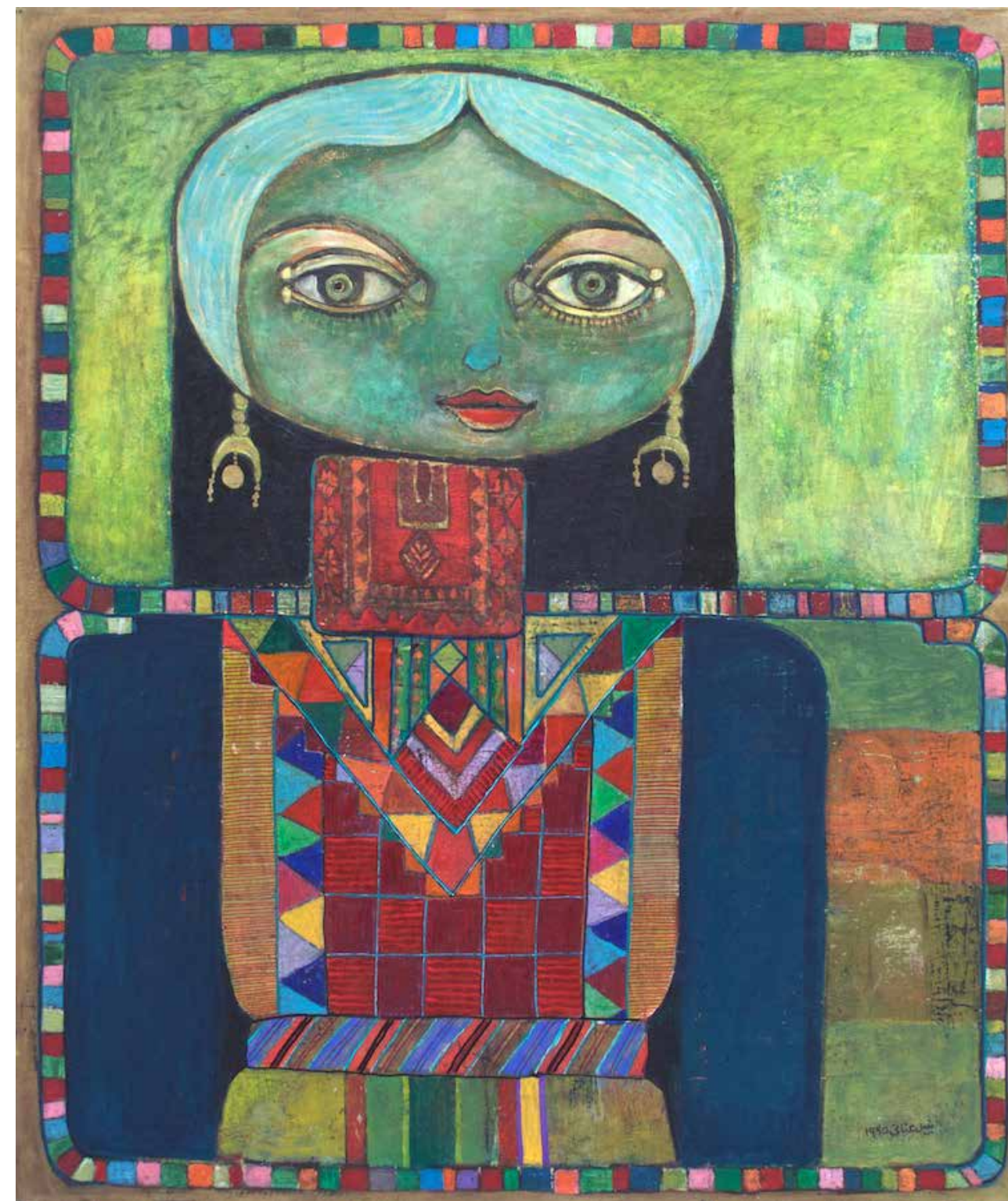
"She was like, uuuh, a catastrophe has happened! She told me, when she reached her home, she had put my art, a leather piece, for a moment on the floor." Enticed by the food smells from the art, the dog began sniffing, then licking, paws scratching and in the end "eating my art," by now Nabil's cheerful laughter has filled his studio. "I told her to come back, I would fix it. I didn't tell her all details," giggling, "but I repaired the leather so that the dog didn't find my art too much tasty. When I handed her back the piece, I congratulated her that her dog has such good taste for art, hahaha!"

How come "Picasso of Palestine" experiments with all kinds of materials, styles and political messages in his art, including sauces and red wine?

"It is, for me, the duty of an artist to seek to new ways. By doing experiments with my art I also challenge the existing, the status quo."

On the same note, this is also where he shares his deep frustration with his land, his society, his people: On one side, he emphasizes, art and culture are very important for the Palestinian identity – but on the other hand, for many reasons, it does not change or move the people, at least not enough. And this is where Anani, this grand character of the art scene, by many considered to be the founder of contemporary art in Palestine, asks if he can switch from English to Arabic to express himself more precisely:

"Culture does not influence our Arab society for many reasons. These reasons stem from its old Islamic, religious and social history and heritage, leading you not to think a lot or stop thinking. This becomes a hindrance to society, preventing us from developing economically and politically, especially because we are under occupation. Dealing with occupation requires people who are thinkers. People with strategic plans on how to deal with culturally, politically, economically, and even religiously. We need to think about all these obstacles. I am not saying that people should leave religion, but they should be thinking about religion differently. The whole world now sees Islam,



"Mother" by Nabil Anani (1995)



"End of Innocence" by Nabil Anani (2016)

the religion, like Islamic State, and indeed ISIS came from ideas already present in Arab societies, it did not come out of nothing. How can you convince a doctor, a medic, to blow himself up amidst Muslim fellows? It is evident that there are leftover sedimentations in the brain that we are not able to get rid of, and they form a huge obstruction for social development."

Switching to English, Nabil Anani exclaims: "See?! It was much better when I expressed myself in Arabic!" - and he then transforms from his serious to giddy demeanor, once again making jokes and laughing.

Day after day, still, Nabil Anani still goes down into his home studio in Ramallah. On his way he touches the olive trees in the small garden, lights up his pipe, feeds the cats, opens the simple metal door for the light to come into the studio and begins painting. He often turns to fooling around with some new experiments in the glazing of his ceramics, smoking a new pipe, then adding details to another of his strongly colourful paintings,

embracing the essentials of life in Palestine, full of life and sweet moments, though, always with something serious and dark, somewhere, maybe just a tiny touch. Why does a famous, rich, father of four children - all with good careers and having given him the grace of grandchildren - who has a loving wife, whose hair has gone all white, why does he still need to go and smoke in his dusty, private hideaway-studio while expressing his opinions "of everything" in his art?

"What I can say? It is all I can do. Besides smoking my pipe," he jokes, smiling. "Nowadays, since it is modern not to smoke inside and my wife says no, you have already seen all the times that you and I have met, we have to go down to the studio and smoke. In my studio I can do whatever I want, that's also a good reason for me to go down there and work". He laughs again, more like giggling, as we share some tobacco like two boys hiding behind the shed in the school yard.

After several weeks of meetings, after many hours talking, after laughing out loud, sharing warm moments, Arabic coffee and tobacco, I ask him what he feels about that some people in the cultural circles naming him the "Picasso of Palestine", he smiles, shrugging his shoulders in an almost shy way: "No, no, it's too much, it's too much. Honestly, we are many Picassos in Palestine." Now we have moved up from the studio to sit at the kitchen table to eat a bite. Then his wife brings us Arabic coffee, and we escape to the terrace to smoke.

It is raining, and it feels like winter is drawing near in Ramallah. We met at first in the heat of late summer, now for every new meeting it is getting colder and darker in Palestine.

"I love it. I love the rain, it washes away and prepares for new life. I know for you, being from Denmark, maybe you do not feel good

about the cold and the darkness. For me, I work more during the winter when I can stay all day in the studio painting. And smoke my pipe. When spring comes, I must go out more, to see, to smell, to feel my country. Often I just stand out there, maybe outside a small village, and paint."

In addition to this article, *The Danish House in Palestine* produced a 35 minutes documentary film entitled "Picasso of Palestine – meet Nabil Anani" from his home and private studio in Ramallah, sharing his liberal views on art, culture and life in Palestine and The Arab World.

The film is available with English subtitles on our Facebook-page + our YouTube-channel. The film is also published with Arabic subtitles by Wattan TV.



2018 Palestine News Brief

General

Through 2018, decision makers, experts, diplomats, journalists and many other professionals, from both Palestine and abroad, often mentioned the possibility of a major war – mainly Israel attacking Hamas in Gaza - and/or a uprising, a Third Intifada. This fear was fuelled by a general rise of attacks and clashes all over the West Bank, and by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

No full-scale wars broke out in 2018, yet the year saw escalations of conflicts – between Israel and Palestine, between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, between Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas, and in general a growing internal Palestinian friction and dissent within the West bank.

Closed Military Zone of Ramallah

For several days in 2018, the Israeli Army declared Ramallah a closed military zone, basically enforcing a lockdown of the whole city by closing all roads and checkpoints in and out of the city. The first lockdown on December 13 came after a string of deadly attacks against Israeli settlers and soldiers. During raids in the West Bank, mainly around Ramallah, Israeli soldiers killed three Palestinians – a fourth was killed when he lost control of his car near DOC CP, northern exit to Nablus.

Internal Politics

PA (Fatah) and Hamas are still in open conflict. Hundreds of mutual arrests all over the West Bank and in Gaza. Through the year, there were direct attacks on media outlets, where several reporters were arrested, kidnapped and killed. The PA-Hamas conflict now has been ongoing for over 12 years, the lack of reconciliation being the key argument of not holding elections since 2006.

Media

From Reporters Without Borders (2018):
“Triple pressure: Interrogations and detention without any charge are part of the price that journalists pay for the political rivalry between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. Several media sites were labelled as opposition media by the Palestinian Authority and blocked in 2017. The political tension combined with harassment by the Israeli authorities complicates the work of Palestinian journalists so much that many of them censor themselves.”

The Great March of Return

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been protesting and attacking the Israeli fence around Gaza – from inside the fence itself. On March 30, the first Friday march began, involving people from all walks of life, including families and children. The demonstrators are calling for ‘The right to return’ for Palestinian refugees to their land, and demanding also that the now 12 year long Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip comes to an end. The Great March of Return was intended to be a popular movement, as well as an “event” that would attract new international awareness. Both goals were achieved – but only for some time. When the clashes at the fence was most violent (March and May 2018) and bloody, more than 50 Gazans were shot and killed, many by Israeli snipers. The march is ongoing; more than 250 have been killed and more than 23.000 have been wounded. And almost every Friday there are protests and clashes erupting around the fence.

UNRWA

Significant budget cuts to UNRWA - with its major donor, the USA, declaring a full stop in funding – have a serious impact on approximately 5 million Palestinian refugees inside Palestine and in neighboring countries.

Gaza

The humanitarian situation in Gaza, through out 2018 and on-going, is still a serious threat to the health and lives of the majority of the population. The Israeli – and Egyptian – blockade on Gaza is on-going for now over 12 years, closing the area from land, sea, and air – with serious consequences (security, health, employment) and strong warnings from UN of an on-going humanitarian disaster, on many levels disabling the 2 million population and infrastructure, acutely and on a longer term.

Casualties

In total, in the Palestinian territories, 295 Palestinians were killed and more than 29.000 were injured in 2018 by Israeli forces. This is the highest death toll in a single year since the Gaza conflict of 2014 and the highest number of injuries recorded since OCHA began documenting casualties in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) in 2005.

In 2018, OCHA recorded 265 incidents where Israeli settlers killed or injured Palestinians or damaged Palestinian property, marking a 69 % increase compared with 2017.

There were at least 181 incidents where Palestinians killed or injured settlers and other Israeli civilians in the West Bank or damaged Israeli property, a 28 % decline compared with the previous year. However, the number of Israelis killed in these incidents in 2018 (seven), increased compared to 2017 (four).

Nation-state Law

Israel has now agreed on laws that define Israel as "the historical homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it". It also states that an undivided Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and strips Arabic of its designation as an official language, downgrading it to a "special status".

Media Freedom Survey in Palestine (2018)

The Main Findings (extract from the report*), answers from survey among Palestinian journalists in the West Bank, East-Jerusalem and Gaza:

91% said that Palestinian journalists are subjugated to violations related to their work

90% of journalists said that they practice self-censorship out of fear of being interrogated by security agencies in Palestine

89% of journalists said that they practiced self-censorship out of fear of social pressure or public scrutiny

83% believe that the media in Palestine is not independent; 97% believe that it is influenced by political and partisan biases, and 87% believe that it is influenced by the interests of the private sector.

* <http://www.madacenter.org>

US Embassy to Jerusalem

The 14 May moving of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has made a serious impact on Palestinians' belief in support from especially the USA and from the international community in general.

By moving the embassy, US president Donald J. Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Yet, Palestinians also see Jerusalem as their capital and center of the holy Al-Aqsa mosque, the third most holy place after Mecca and Medina. Following the USA, Australia and Brazil have also announced that their embassies will move to Jerusalem. On the same day the US Embassy moved, 14 May, a Friday, the day before the 70th anniversary of Al-Nakba, 61 protesters were shot in Gaza, and 2.400 wounded.

Settlements & barriers

Illegal settlements were expanded and new settlements are planned throughout the West Bank.


Approximately 620.000 settlers now live in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem (2.800) - sources: OCHA + Israeli NGO Ir Amim, December 2018.

There are now most 600 military checkpoints/barriers all over the West Bank, with approximately 44 permanently staffed. In Hebron people face more than 100 barriers to entry, including 18 permanent checkpoints inside Hebron city (H2).

70 years of Nakba

In 1948, some 70 years ago, Israel was created and more than 700.000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes and expelled from their homeland. On May 15 the Nakba – meaning 'catastrophe' in Arabic – saw protests all over Palestine. In Ramallah the protests were not in the streets, but were a one-day general strike.

Circus making future leaders

A low-angle shot looking up at a woman in mid-air, jumping on a trampoline. The scene is set inside a large, dark blue tent. In the background, there are metal truss structures with bright stage lights hanging from them. Two other people are visible on the trampoline below. The overall atmosphere is one of excitement and activity.

"I want to be a martyr" used to be a common answer, when The Palestinian Circus School asked children about their dreams. Now they answer circus artist, musician, doctor, lawyer. Yet, when the school's founder is asked what is the biggest challenge for the future, he immediately answers: "Extremism. Absolutely."

We meet because the founder and director for more than 12 years, Shadi Zmorrod, is leaving both his circus school and Palestine. Since the beginning there have been strong ties between the school, The Danish House in Palestine, and Denmark, including exchanges of circus artists and -performances.

The day that we meet, Israeli soldiers during several days have been raiding shops and homes inside Ramallah, with deadly clashes erupting.

What are the biggest struggles for the future of the circus school?

"Extremism is one big part," Shadi Zmorrod answers.

In what way?

"I believe that in nations where there is a conflict situation, a war, or it is under occupation, people do not feel safe. And the fastest way to feel safe is to go to any religion, and going to a religion based on fear creates extremism."

Struggling with extremism is an issue which is somewhat the cornerstone of the cooperation between The Palestinian Circus School in Birzeit, West Bank, some 10 kilometers from The Danish House in Palestine, which since 2010 has been based in Ramallah.

Why do you think that extremism would be one of the biggest struggles for the circus school?

"Because we live under occupation, and every day we see that all these catastrophes might attack us and get bigger and bigger. And we see that Ramallah is being invaded on a daily basis. If the same rhythm of the beginning of Second Intifada comes, of course we will have more extremism, as we are not able to meet other people, learn from other nations and cultures. So, when you are isolated, of course, that creates the worst parts of a human being. When you think only about how to survive, that is a catastrophe if you are completely isolated."

So those people who might become even more extreme because of the situation, they might attack or want the circus to be closed...or what are your fears specifically?

"Yeah, absolutely rejecting circus, rejecting arts."

In which ways do the cooperation with The Danish House make a difference for The Palestinian Circus School?

"I would start from the beginning of the cooperation with Denmark. It was a very crucial moment with the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad released (2005), and after

a year we started our cooperation with the circus school (Cirkus Gøgler skolen) in Aarhus (in Denmark). This group of Danish people wanted to show Palestinians, especially, and Arabs in general, that they (the Danish) are not all the person who made the caricature or the newspaper who put it up. No, there are (Danish) people who are also against it. At the same time, for us as a circus school, at that time we also needed an artistic capacity building, and to meet different cultures, how do they perform circus, and also for them to learn how we as Palestinians do circus in these circumstances.

We still cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding: What do the Danish people need to learn from us, and what do we need to learn from the Danish people? We should not isolate ourselves, we should not be radicals, we need to open up as humans to other ways of thinking and believing".

Since an early age, Shadi Zmorrod has been a passionate believer in expressing himself through the performing arts – as a pre-teen at 12 years old, he lost his heart to the circus. With no internet, and no books available about circus, the small, red-headed, blue-eyed boy began watching closely "once, maximum twice a year" circus shows that were broadcast on TV. He became involved in theatre, and his very first role was to be a clown who was also juggling:

"I began to learn juggling at home, using everything looking like balls, pulling whatever out from my family's fridge. Just don't take the eggs, my mother used to say."

Building his circus skills step by step, by the end of year 2005, Shadi Zmorrod, at that time 26 years old, decided to build his own circus school - the first of its kind in Palestine:

"Our kids needed a safe place. A place to release their anger, the anger that surrounds us. You go to school and see one kid following another kid with a stick, and the teacher following both kids with a stick. The kids go outside school, there they also fight. They go home, and there, also, they get beaten. There is this circle of violence in Palestine. I always say that we should not always blame the occupation, but of course the main reason for the violence is the occupation."

"I wanted to take the kids away from the danger zones of the streets and homes, let them release the negative energy, then experience and bring with them all the positivity from circus arts. Because, they are the future leaders of Palestine."

The year before the very first students entered in 2006, before students entered



to learn juggling, jumping trampoline and various other disciplines of The Palestinian Circus School, the founder Shadi Zmorrod went all over his country – visiting schools, refugee camps, villages – to research if actually, beyond himself, there was an interest in and need of circus in Palestine: “I asked all kids one very simple question: What is your dream for the future? The kids answered: ‘I want to be a martyr’. But why should becoming a martyr be the only way to resist? There are different kinds of resisting, and all kinds of resistance are allowed, by international law, as a country under occupation.

For more than 70 years we tried resisting the occupation, but I say, let us try different things!

And I believe, in this moment, that art is one of the best ways to give the right image of who Palestinians are and what is occupation. In order to raise international awareness – and to raise hope for the Palestinian kids, showing them different ways to resist the occupation.”

What are the dreams of Palestinian children, when you ask them now, more than 12 years after creating the circus school?

“Today, if I ask the same questions as I did in 2005, I would not hear kids answering that they wish to become martyrs. I would hear more ‘I want to be a dancer, a circus artist, a musician, a doctor, a lawyer’, whatever, but you will not hear ‘I want to be a martyr’”.

On the front page of the school’s website it is written: “Dignity, unity, respect, trust but most of all hope are under serious threat” – describing what Palestinians are facing, and hence also the challenges of the circus school.

Building hope, from the creation and still today, is essential to what the school do; from trainings to performances – in the words of the now departing director:

“What we are doing is really building or rebuilding hope, since as Palestinians we have lost our hope in general due to all the

political situation, and from living under occupation.”

By now you have had thousands of children and young people passing through the school, what are the parents telling you?

“Both from the parents and the schools, we hear that the kids joining our circus school show higher concentration, and that they are more socially integrated. A lot of the first generation of kids from the circus school, are all now leaders! In art, culture, and some even on political and social levels. So, you can see the difference in kids who are participating in performing arts and culture and those who are not.”

Within media, politics and people all over the world, merely the word ‘circus’ is often used as describing something chaotic, not serious, playing around and even foolish. The circus family - leaders, trainers and students - also has to fight exactly this: Convincing people that circus can make a difference.

“When we teach kids to juggle, they learn to be coordinated. When learning to walk the robe, we teach them how to be balanced. When we ask them to build the human pyramid, standing on top of each other, we teach them to be serious and trust each other. All our trainings are leading the children to become better actors in general for the Palestinian society.”

Again, the now 39-year-old Shadi Zmorrod – having begun professional circus career over 12 years by juggling whatever resembled something round inside his family’s fridge – emphasizes the need of the world to understand the Israeli occupation, the sufferings and the more diverse, positive faces of Palestinians.

“Thanks to the social media, people can now see and read about Palestine from different perspectives, not only through the eyes of their governments. Through circus, culture, all kinds of performing arts, people now see us on Facebook, they learn about us – before, when I was abroad and told people

that I come from Palestine, many people replied ‘Ah, Pakistan!’ Now people notice our circus, circus is a sexy way for people to meet and understand us... when you say ‘circus from Palestine’, things do not fit together, people ask me, how does it work? Yeah, well, circus is another way to build awareness for the international community.”

By now, The Palestine Circus School is acknowledged worldwide. It receives funding from abroad, mainly Europe – and receives support from a string of both international and local partnerships.

Yet again, in Shadi Zmorrod’s mind - now leaving both the circus and his homeland Palestine to live in Belgium with his Belgian wife, Jessika Devleighere, co-founder of the circus school, and their son - the biggest challenges and threats to the circus are from the same people who helped build the school: International organisations who might cut their funding, and locals who might turn into extremists, take more power and pressure the free spirit, in specific the freedom of expression.

“Nothing can stop you from reaching your dream. Even if they want to destroy you, people, your kids, your friends will take over your dream. People used to practise different arts in hiding, it was completely forbidden and you would go to prison... The circus school will not close, and will never close, it will create more challenges, but also give us more energy to keep it and to make it grow, grow, grow, even if we would do our trainings underground, or in the open air, outside in the cold, as we used to do when we established the school. We do not care,



as long as we can release and build inner peace for ourselves as human beings, first of all, and as Palestinians.

Even if the funding stops, which is the second biggest challenge that we face as right-wing extremism in Europe is taking the lead of the governments and they cut the funding for their own culture and for other countries. That is another big threat. But all we need is to eat bread, and we did that: We ate bread in '48 (The creation of Israel and beginning of Israeli occupation of Palestine, 1948), in '67 (The Six Days War, 1967), in '82 in Lebanon (Israel invasion of Lebanon, 1982), First and Second Intifada... Nobody can take off the head of a human being, which means that nobody can take away the dream of a human being."

When he talks and discusses, the words and the eyes of the now soon 'retired circus-boy' often are as dark and powerful as the days of the Second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising, from where his deep feeling of a need to create a circus school in Palestine in many ways originated. The need to build a Palestinian youth with hope, and with the spirit needed to become future leaders of Palestine.

But beneath, or maybe rather above the occupation and darkness, the most common words from founder Shadi Zmorrod

answering questions about the school are by far: Dreams, hope, love, peace.

You founded the circus school more than 12 years ago, if you should say one thing being the biggest success, what is that?

"Looking at the kids practising, loving, hoping, enjoying and having peace when they are on stage."

Are you going to miss it?

"Hu...yeah, but it is time for me to leave, because I believe the founder is the killer. We need new ideas, new energy and fresh blood."

But it is still your baby that you are leaving?

"Well, the father and mother never leaves the baby alone, but the baby should also learn how to be independent. And whenever the baby needs the father and mother, also they are always there. We have, at this moment, a lovely team, with Mohamad Rabah (new director) who joined in July (2018), and together they create a new, brilliant, amazing energy for the Palestinian circus school.

We always wanted to create circus from Palestinians to Palestinians – with love and hope, and peace."

"Thanks to the social media (...) people now see us on Facebook, they learn about us.

Now people notice our circus, circus is a sexy way for people to meet and understand us.

When you say circus from Palestine, things do not fit together, people tell me, how does it work. Yeah, well, circus is another way to build awareness for the international community."



“History is a weapon”

For Palestinians, it is essential to go thousands of years back in time, history student Faisal Zakarneh from Jenin believes. Because ancient history is creating Palestinian identity, and ancient history has an impact on Palestinian reality today – which has been the core of lectures and academic exchange between Palestine and Denmark.



“Israel is trying to eliminate us and use religion as a tool to claim historical ownership of our land. We’re facing an aggressive attack on our reality and our identity. History is a weapon, but it’s also a tool that I can use. Historical truth can be used to serve our national struggle,” says ph.d. student Faisal Zakarneh who, while doing his thesis, has been collaborating with the Danish-American professor emeritus Thomas L. Thompson from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Copenhagen.

Faisal Zakarneh, 46 years old from Jenin, first met Thomas L. Thompson in April 2018 when Thompson and associate professor emerita Ingrid Hjelm were presenting a lecture about the Palestinian History and Heritage project. Thompson and Hjelm gave altogether ten interrelated lectures in Palestinian academic institutions for more than 450 Palestinian

students, supported by The Danish House.

The lectures gave new perspectives to discussions about history and myths, and how both are used in the claim for land and creation of identity in Palestine. Palestinian students rarely meet scholars, especially foreign scholars, who are trying to offer a non-biblical rewriting of the region’s history and culture:

“Dr. Thompson’s history is not dealing with politics, but with scientific research. He should do hundreds of rounds in Palestine to tell the results of his research,” Faisal Zakarneh says.

For the Danish-American professor, giving the lectures was equally surprising. He expected to meet students who were conservative and quiet. Instead, he met students who were critical and pushed him to talk openly about his views.

“It has left Palestinians as a threatened people, a people without a history of their own. Stories can take on a power, which they were never given. If a story is confused with the past, it can be used as a weapon.”

“I was amazed. The students were very engaged in the question of who they were and how this question might affect developments in politics. I had the feeling that they did not believe the histories they were told by scholars. They were angry about being lied to about their past,” he says.

Palestinian history has become “biblicized”

Thomas L. Thompson and Ingrid Hjelm were met with questions such as “how is it possible to be critical of your own religion?” and “is Judaism related to Israel?”. The students were especially interested in the question of how much you can understand biblical literature as historical. A question that his research has revolved around since he wrote his dissertation some 45 years ago. In his dissertation, he argues that biblical literature is involved with stories and metaphor - not history.

“It’s examples of parables and stories that have a moral or ethical theme to them. You read them in the same way that you might read Plato,

Aristoteles, or Sheherazad. They tell us about what people thought in the past rather than what they did.”

For the past 100 years, the writing of history in Palestine has been used as a weapon, Thomas L. Thompson says. Palestinian history has become “biblicized”.

“It has left Palestinians as a threatened people, a people without a history of their own. Stories can take on a power, which they were never given. If a story is confused with the past, it can be used as a weapon.”

The lectures, which were given at six academic institutions in Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Hebron, and Jenin will this year, 2019, be translated into Arabic and distributed to libraries in universities all over the West Bank, East Jerusalem and in Gaza. The academic exchange is one of the year-long projects within The Danish House – exchanging between Denmark and Palestine new findings, new questions, and new discussions in various scientific fields.

DEAR VISITOR, we seriously welcome you!



Our Visitors

We care about all the people who visit us in The Danish House in Palestine.

To everyone that we connect with

– Danish students, interns and volunteers as well as partners, supporters, friends and guests, including all of you who just pass by our old, beautiful house in the downtown of old Ramallah for a cup of coffee

– all of our staff will give you professional briefings.

At times, the situation can be challenging or rapidly changing; for some actions and areas you need to show due diligence. We always update visitors on security and safety, in general and when needed day-by-day.

During briefings or informal meetings we are all committed to share our unique insights, broad spectrum of experiences, facts and feelings. We offer you the historical perspectives and what is currently happening on the ground and among the people. And we often bring in special experts

or dedicated individuals to give you trustworthy and solid information, “custom made” to the exact needs of our many precious guests: for visitors coming by for some days or hours and academic researchers, journalists, students, volunteers alike, we have an open-door-policy: Ahlen wa sahlen, you are welcome to contact us at anytime – and we will do our best to help you.

In December, a big group of young Danish documentary makers from Aarhus Filmværksted stayed in our Guest House while working together with young filmmakers from our partner Filmlab: Palestine, developing, creating, empowering documentaries about Palestine. Upon their return to Denmark we asked them about their stay in Palestine:

“...it brought us closer to an understanding and a look into what it actually means to live in an occupied country...I have no doubt, that I want to go back and further explore Palestine!”

Mia Kronborg, Project Coordinator:

“We were in Ramallah from the 2nd to the 20th of December. It was a wild experience in every way. I had never travelled in the Middle East before, so the first thing I noticed was the extreme friendliness and openness we were met with no matter where we went. Everyone was being very welcoming and were curious to find out what we were doing in Palestine - and what we thought of it. They were all very eager to tell their story, both as a person and as a nation. It was wild to experience how much Palestine’s history and culture fill up people’s everyday life. There was unrest while we were there. Ramallah was closed down by the military, we heard shots at night, saw demonstrations

“...I only have good things to say about The Danish House...they kept us in the loop regarding everyday stuff, events in the house, but, most importantly, we got updates the last week when the clashes and the unrest began escalating. It made it possible for us to navigate in a situation, which would otherwise have been difficult.”

in the streets and shops closed. Even though we didn’t see any fighting ourselves, it without any doubt affected our stay, both in practical terms, but also, and most importantly, it brought us closer to an understanding and a look into what it actually means to live in an occupied country. It led us to many conversations about the conflict, both among ourselves, but also with the locals, that we probably wouldn’t have had in another situation. And that we wouldn’t miss for the world. But I have no doubt, that I want to go back and further explore Palestine!”

Rebekka Jørgensen, Filmmaker

“We got an idea of the circumstances, that the Palestinians are living under, especially when the worst clashes and levels of unrest seen in many years erupted while we there. Shops where closed, demonstrations in the street and we suddenly found ourselves in a closed military zone. It was a frightening experience getting so close all of a sudden, but it gave us a whole other perspective on the conflict than we would otherwise have gotten. I think Palestine is an amazing place and I can’t wait to get back - the sooner the better.

I only have good things to say about The Danish House. Their guesthouse was excellent and they kept us in the loop regarding everyday stuff, events in the house, but, most importantly, we got updates the last week when the clashes and the unrest began escalating. It made it possible for us to navigate in a situation which would otherwise have been difficult.”

WORK, LIFE & DREAMS *Meet Our Staff*



Philip Krebs, Communication Intern:

Moving to Palestine and working at The Danish House has taught me many things, both professionally and on a personal level. And it once again underscored how appreciative I should be for being Danish and living in Denmark. But most importantly it has shown me Palestine and given me a home away from home in the Middle East. Finishing my Master's Degree by handing in my Thesis this summer is going to be a major milestone. It also heralds in a new chapter away from dusty schoolbooks, classrooms and an enjoyable, worrisome student life. I'm very excited for this next step.

Sahar Soufan, Project Officer:

In 2018, I learned how to work under uncertain circumstances and to challenge myself to do the best I can. I believe that 2018 was tough on all of us in the Danish House, however, we managed to keep up the good work and the positive atmosphere. Personally, 2018 was a success! I finished my Master studies, and yes! I am now a Master graduate! Wohoo ;)

For 2019 I wish we can expand our activities and projects. Reach out to more children and young people in marginalized areas in Palestine. Reach Gaza Strip and leave a finger print in the children and young people's lives there. Personally, I still believe I have many things to learn in this world and the Danish House provides wonderful teaching experiences to me.



Dima El Aref Nashashibi, HR & Administration Manager:

The most important things for me in 2018 was that I have attained successfully the admin/HR and volunteer's program objectives and expected results. Also the growing trust in myself despite of many challenges and obstacles that strengthened me and enabled me to accomplish my responsibilities effectively and efficiently. In 2019, I seek to tackle new opportunities and new horizons in order to advance more and achieve my long-term career goals and personal ambitions. My motto for 2019 is: Make things happen instead of waiting for them to happen.

Doha Jabr, Project Officer:

What was most important for me last year, is that we at The Danish House have managed to sustain and deliver great results, working and finishing the great projects, in addition to that we have managed to reach new areas that we have not been in before, for example, Qalqilya and Silwan, which both have a critical and sensitive situation. For me personally, finally, I started my big challenge in studying my Master in International Cooperation and Development MICAD from Bethlehem University. My ambition for 2019 is to benefit more people in Palestine and give inspiration and support to more organizations to keep the great job they do towards Palestine.



Rasmus Meldgaard, Project Intern:

2018 was a year where I challenged myself to do an internship abroad, somewhere I had not been before. The most important thing in my personal life was to gain an experience of a lifetime, learn about a new culture, and travel a part of the world I had not seen yet, which hopefully could give me a boost on the job market! 2019 welcomes a lot of changes! The most important thing for me, in terms of work, is that I get a meaningful job after this summer, where I can see myself grow!



Abeer Habash, Administration Officer:

The most important thing for me in 2018 regarding work is that we managed, together as a team, to be tenacious and stick together through hard times and periods of uncertainty. This showed me that there are some true friends that you can count on, and that we are a resilient office that can face all kinds of challenges. Personally, the most important thing is that my family remained unharmed and in good health.

For 2019, I am hoping our team to continue to working together, and for the office to thrive with our new director. Personally, I wish for my boys to have success in their lives and dreams, and for everyone in my family to remain safe and sound.

Mohammad Awar, Internal Auditor & Acting Director (2018):

The most important to me in 2018 in work was: The new position as an Acting Director at the The Danish House and resigned from the Edward Said Conservatory after 17 years working with them in different high positions.

Personally, my decision to do a volunteer work with Jerusalemite Youth Cultural Forum in Silwan as General Director was to serve youths in this marginalized area.

The most important in 2019 in work is to succeed in my work both at The Danish House and at the Youth Forum in collaboration with my colleagues. Personally, I hope for freedom of Palestine and freedom to live in peace and safety.



Helle Schierbeck, Director:

In 2018, I was gifted with the opportunity to take a sabbatical year. It was challenging to slow down, not to have a plan. Just to stay open. Explore. I knew that I wanted to change my direction in life. While I was on a road trip in Spain, I saw the vacancy notice. Had no idea that The Danish House existed. I started to read about Palestine. There was no doubt, what so ever: I have to live in Ramallah, I have to have this job. Khalas, here I am. This is the best.

2019? This is such a huge question. To stay open, humble. To learn. To relate, inspire. To do my very best and even more to provide opportunities, to create open-ended spaces for Palestinians and Danes to do artistic co-productions, for them to debate, to learn from one another, to reach out, to tell stories, to tell the story.

Niveen Shaheen, Finance Officer:

The most important for me in 2018 was proactively participating in achieving The Danish House objectives. I managed to handle several extra responsibilities efficiently and effectively to reach the expected goals, moreover these goals will not be achieved without the cooperation between Danish and Palestinian staff and the team spirit that played major role of overcoming several obstacles with the full support from our management. On the personal side I am very glad that I gained many inspiring friends in 2018. For 2019, my ambition is seeing The Danish House able to flourish in a sustainable environment.



Jeppe Nybroe, Communication Manager:

After more than 20 years working as a journalist, reporting worldwide and living in different countries, since 2018 Palestine is now both my work place and my new home – and I am very grateful for the warm welcome and amazing support of all the smart, steadfast and passionate Palestinians I have met on my way.

Professionally as well as personally, I find profound meaning and have ever-growing ambitions in the mission of our work for 2019 and the years to come: Based on basic Human Rights to improve dialogue and better understanding between Denmark and Palestine, including the broader Middle East and Arab world.

PRESS REPORT

You can trust The Danish House in Palestine. You can trust that we will always communicate about people, together with people, for people. To make sure that reports on daily life and the important messages from the people is known to world around us.

You can trust that we - within our mandate as an independent, non-political, cultural Danish-Palestinian NGO – always work to report the best obtainable version of realities as they are.

And you can trust that not only do we seek to engage the civilian societies of Palestine and Denmark, we always aim at promoting valuable dialogue and understanding.

We, with all of our various Palestinian and Danish voices, wish to make a difference.

In 2018, our words and values were spread in numerous Palestinian as well as Danish media outlets. From our chair and former director, Ms. Lone Bildsoe Lassen sharing eyewitness-accounts on the situation in Gaza – to our new director, Ms. Helle Schierbeck, reporting on the ongoing debate about the controversial British street-artist Banksy designing The Walled Of Hotel next to his graffiti-like decorating of the wall around Bethlehem – and our Danish-Palestinian board member, Mr. Bilal al-Isaa, talking about his passionate involvement to exchanging young boxers between the Danish Vollsmose Boxing Club and the progressive ElBarrio Gym in Ramallah. And our program officer Sahar Soufan explaining to numerous media about our many projects.

Our many couch-talks and events – from female football players to “hug a dog”, Palestine Photo Festival and “Meet The Press” about investigative journalism – all hosted inside the offices in our old house in Ramallah and with a total audience of approximately 10.000 people, have received overwhelming attention from the Palestinian media.

The numbers of followers, likes and shares on our Facebook and Instagram are booming – within the past half year of 2018 we got about 2.000 new Facebook-followers - now way above 8.000 in total - and our Instagram-fans have grown more than five-fold from some 200 to more than 1.000. Someone once said that “it is nice to be important, but it is more important to be nice”. We believe in this. At the same time, with the significant increase of social media audience, we also believe in somewhat becoming our own media platform – a place where people from all walks of life can join, get inspired and find the latest information on our work.

In 2018, we produced a documentary film about the famous Palestinian artist Nabil Anani. The production of small films is yet another new way of us reaching out to you, and the film “Picasso of Palestine – meet Nabil Anani”, not only got a lot of attention on our social media, it was also subtitled in Arabic and broadcasted by Wattan TV, and it was publicly screened in USA, Canada and Denmark. And now, with both English and Arabic subtitles, it is available for free and for everyone at our own TV-channel on YouTube.

Strategic partners

Al Harah Theatre, Beit Jala
Filmlab, Ramallah
Palestinian Circus School, Birzeit
Palestinian Performing Arts Network, Ramallah
Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ramallah

Other partners in Palestine

Al Rowat for Studies and Research
Birzeit University Media Development Center
ElBarrio, Ramallah
Made in Palestine
Palestinian Museum, Birzeit
Safar Theatre, Ramallah

Danish partners

Aarhus Film Workshop
ARoS, Aarhus Art Museum
Circus Tvaers, Aarhus
Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute, Cairo
Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen
International Media Support, Copenhagen
MS Action Aid, Copenhagen
Opgang 2, Aarhus
UCC University College, Copenhagen
Vollsmose Boxing, Odense

Partners hosting Danish volunteers

Accountability for Violence Against Children, Ramallah
Arab World for Research and Development, Ramallah
Al-Ahli Hospital, Hebron
Al-Rowwad Cultural and Arts Society
Aida Camp, Bethlehem
Am'ari Camp Clinic, Al-Bireh

Institute for Modern Media, Ramallah,
Global Platform Palestine
Jerusalemite Youth Cultural Forum, Jerusalem
Juzoor for Health and Social Development, Ramallah
MIFTAH, Ramallah, Palestine
Orient and Dance Theatre, Ramallah,
Palestinian Center for Development and Media
Freedoms, Al-Bireh, Palestine
Palestinian Medical Relieve Society, Al-Bireh
Palestinian Working Women's Society for
Development, Ramallah
Policy and Conflict Resolution Studies Center,
Ramallah
Qalandia Camp Clinic, Qalandia Refugee Camp
Radio Niisa Ramallah
Ramallah Governmental Hospital, Ramallah,
SAWA Organisation, Ramallah
Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of
Torture, Ramallah

Board of The Danish House in Palestine

Lone Bildsøe Lassen, Chair
Gry Krogager Lund, Deputy Chair
Kirsten Jensen, Treasurer
Bilal Al-Issa, Board Member
Ghassan Abdullah, Board Member
Yara Odeh, Board Member
Bjørn Meidell, Board Member
Daoud Ghoul, Alternate Member
Saer El-Jaichi, Alternate Member

Financial Overview 2018 (Danish Kroner)

INCOME

Projects grant (unspent 2017)	310.275
Danish MoFA	3.496.264
MS - Action Aid	153.774
DFI	19.720
Total project grants	3.980.033
Unrestricted grants/income	
DHIP programs and Activities	67.102
Accommodation	22.535
Total unrestricted	89.637
Total Available income	4.069.670

EXPENSES

Projects/Activities	3.210.743
Rent and operating costs	134.797
Administration	107.448
(Gain) Loss on currency differential	(60.416)
	63.900
Total expenses	3.456.472

2018 balance sheet (DKK)

ASSETS

Current assets	954.937
Prepaid expenses	105.787
Fixed assets (net)	143.406
Total assets	1.204.130

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Accruals and payables	686.224
Net assets	517.906
Total liabilities and net assets	1.204.130

Editor: **Jeppe Nybroe**
Photos: **Jeppe Nybroe**

Layout: **Majdi Hadid & Jeppe Nybroe**
Print: **iPrint, Ramallah, West Bank**

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