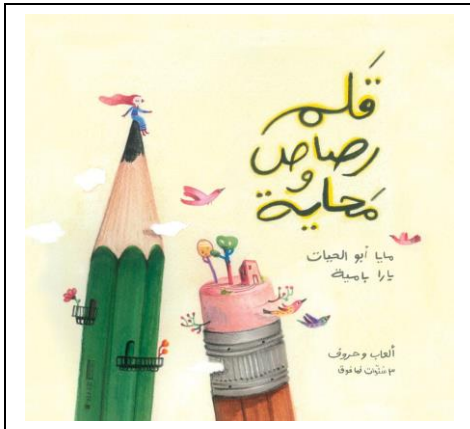


To: Sacramento Sister City Council

September 2020

The omnipresent factor in all our lives -- in Sacramento or in Bethlehem or wherever -- is Covid-19 and at the end of this report, we address the situation in Bethlehem, and in Palestine more generally.

Some of the things SacramentoBethlehem Sister City is doing: ♥ Our current **scholarship** students, **Adele and Layan** are doing quite well despite all that is going on around them. Classes in Palestinian schools and colleges will be a mix of virtual and socially-distanced. ♥ **Sac4Palestine** is the name for the Sacramento region's team in UNRWA's annual **5K race fundraiser for Gaza**. Of course, the team includes **SacBeth** folks! Unfortunately, on the eve of the race, smoky air caused us to scratch the running part. But we were part of the worldwide virtual get together. And ultimately the event is really about fundraising and showing solidarity with Gaza. ♥ Another kind of virtual event that some of us are signing up for is **virtual tours**. To places like Yafa, the Bride of the Sea. The guides are particularly knowledgeable about what we are seeing and well able to answer any questions we pose along the way. ♥ **SacBeth** connects with other sister cities when we come across something we think might interest them. A couple of recent e-mails with **Köln-Bethlehem** (Cologne, Germany): a jpg of the painting of George Floyd on the Wall in Bethlehem; and information about a Berlin-based photographer who's been taking amazing photos of Palestine for decades, Kai Wiederhoefer.



More Arabic children's books: Our friends, Palestine Writing Workshop, are creating more children's books. Among them an alphabet book and, naturally, the illustrations are simply stunning – even though it's a bit difficult to see in this tiny square.

And we learned that PWW dynamo Maya's books of poetry has been translated from Arabic into German and it's getting great reviews!

Via webinar, our frequent partner, *Bright Stars of Bethlehem* (which supports *Dar al-Kalima University College of Art and Culture*) updated us about happenings at the school and in Bethlehem. Especially significant: *Dar al-Kalima* is **bringing classes to the Gaza Strip** so young people there can refine skills

and prepare for art-focused careers without needing to depend upon being able to get an Israel-issued entry/exit permit. (In 2019, another *SacBeth* partner, *Rebuilding Alliance*, helped us share original art from the Gaza Strip with the Sacramento community.)

Congratulations! Brown University hired historian Beshara Doumani as the inaugural Mahmoud Darwish Professor of Palestinian Studies– the U.S.'s **1st endowed faculty chair for Palestine Studies!** One of the endowment donors expressed amazement at this: "I just do not see how any school can have Middle East studies without Palestinian studies. Palestinians are an integral part of the history and culture of the region. ... You want to be able to document and drive research in all these issues."

What a long history! One of Palestinian-British scholar Nur Masallah's books is entitled: *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*.

And so much culture. In our small way, **SacBeth's** events over the years have focused on some aspects of Palestinian culture: Art. Poetry. Dance. Cuisine. Traditional embroidery.

SacramentoBethlehem

September 2020

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Palestine-focused webinars -- across time zones. 7:00am in Sacramento. 10:00am in Boston. 5:00pm in Palestine. Folks in these places and elsewhere are talking about Palestine. Panel discussions. Subject area specialists. Human rights experts. Obama-era policy advisors. Professors. Authors. Lawyers whose specialty is international law and/or U.S. constitutional law.

Persons worth getting up early to listen to. Folks who know what they're talking about. Topics like: annexation, U.S. aid to Israel, E.U. trade sanctions, the 2020 Presidential candidates' positions, erasure (e.g., silencing, denial, employing "alternative" facts), normalization, etc.

Unfortunately, as more and more persons and groups become better informed about and engaged with Palestinian human rights matters, there's been a marked increase – both in number and intensity – of suppression and pushback efforts.



Covid-19: In Bethlehem-- and in Palestine more generally -- 70+ years of displacement, plus 53 years under military occupation, are realities which impact the healthcare systems' ability to respond to Covid-19.

In the Gaza Strip reality, population 2 million, add 13 years of shockingly intense embargo. One of the most densely populated places on earth, Gaza is often referred to as an "open air prison" and for decades, entry and exit have been highly restricted. Initially this meant limited Covid-19 infection: each entering person was quarantined, which prevented "community spread." Unfortunately, that's changed. Last month, there were 1,200 active cases -- mostly "community" transmitted. It's a "nightmare scenario" for the healthcare system, which is on the brink of collapse.

In the West Bank (population 3 million + 325,000 residents of East Jerusalem), European tourists brought in the first Covid-19 infections. A 3-months lockdown was ordered right away. Tourism stopped but the spread of the virus has not. More lockdowns. And there surely will be more still.

Decades of an occupation-suppressed economy, worsened by the "economic strangulation" implemented by the Trump administration, mean that the West Bank's healthcare system almost certainly will not be able to cope adequately.

And a not insignificant aspect of Covid-19 infections in the West Bank is person-to-person contact with Israelis. About 110,000 West Bank Palestinians work in Israel or in Israeli settlements. And thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of children, are under "detention" in Israeli prisons where infection is rampant.

Israel's Prime Minister has so badly mismanaged the Covid-19 crisis that for many weeks, there have been huge protest marches and rallies all over Israel. There's even speculation that this may cause the Netanyahu government to fall. After a nationwide lockdown, followed by a too-early reopening, infections soared – reaching 3,000 new daily infections! In the last few days, Israel imposed a second nationwide lockdown.