

Spring 2008

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF
Neve Shalom Wahat al-Salam
ואהת שלום واحه السلام
OASIS OF PEACE



A word from the President of the American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

Dear Friends,

The situation in Israel and Palestine has reached a new low point. The recent violence on both sides has endangered the already fragile peace process. Still, there is a village that believes in peace and life together and we need to support its efforts.

This spring I visited Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and was impressed by the steadfast determination and continuing hope of its residents. Friendships among children, teenagers and adults from both cultures are growing every day in the village, at the Primary School and are strengthened by the programs at the School for Peace.

People are engaged in powerful and innovative activities, such as joint programs in a hospital to train surgeons both in Palestine and Israel. Teachers are teaching their students the history of the "other" in their classes, and people learn together about the other's faith.

This must continue! Help us support the projects the residents of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam are initiating. They rely on the support of friends like you to develop sustainable projects that make a difference.

At the end of May, we will introduce an exciting new opportunity to talk with NSWAS residents: by calling a toll-free 800 number you will be able to hear

first-hand from and ask questions of someone in the village, thanks to an open conference call. The first speaker will be Ahmad Hijazi the Director of Public Relations at NSWAS. Check our website at www.oasisofpeace.org to learn more and get the final date.

We need your help to pursue our work toward durable and genuine peace in the region. Please make a donation to the American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam. I hope you will enjoy reading about the recent activities of the village.

Yours,

Gordon Webster
President

Please support Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam by making a donation

The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is diligent with your donations. We are proud to receive a 4-Star (Best of) Rating from Charity Navigator for sound fiscal management. We are verified by Guidestar and you can research us at Network for Good. Thank you for everything you do to support the "Oasis of Peace!"

AFNSWAS is a member of ALLMEP

The **Alliance for Middle East Peace** is a coalition of 55 nonprofit organizations who promote people-to-people coexistence between Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East. Through ALLMEP, Americans from diverse religious, ethnic and political backgrounds can join together in support of real efforts to build lasting peace in the region.

ALLMEP furthers its mission through:

1. Opening dialogue to policymakers
2. Public events to support Middle East coexistence
3. Media outreach to raise the Middle East people-to-people profile
4. Increasing public and private resources for coexistence
5. Networking and capacity building to improve NGO impact.

Participate by being in touch with your congressional representative to support ALLMEP's \$11 million fund for grassroots peace activities in the Middle East. Go to our website to download the model letter: http://www.oasisofpeace.org/get_involved.htm#congression al. Visit www.allmep.org for more.



The new buses were purchased in March

The Primary School Special Projects

Thanks to your support, the Primary School recently purchased three small buses. Ninety percent of the students come from outside the village; with the Ministry of Education's decision to cut funding for transportation to the Primary School, the buses have a powerful impact on the students' life by enabling them to continue their education in this unique bilingual, binational, multicultural school.

Living environmentally this year, the Primary School special programs include an "environmental program" which expands on the ecology projects of the earlier years with the goal of making the teachers and students, at every grade, as environmentally conscious as possible. A special teacher, Michal Moses, comes in to instruct the children on environmentally friendly principles, such as recycling, energy conservation, respect for the school environment, etc. There is also an agricultural unit, which involves learning how to grow crops.



Discovering the past, students are working to be archaeologists uncovering and now preserving the Byzantine mosaic that they discovered near the school. They are like the professional archaeologists working with them, learning how to map and records their findings.

Rabbits, turtles and small birds have already settled into their new home in the Zoo Lab. Each day, small groups of students come to feed the animals, clean their habitats and interact with them. The Zoo Lab offers students the chance to develop and deepen sensitivity to the needs and special qualities of each creature while learning about ecosystems, animal behavior, and the impact of people on animal life.



Teachers are hoping to develop spaces for reptiles and insects, and facilities for egg incubation. **Please lend your support!**

Featuring a Major Program at the School for Peace: “Change Agents & Advocates”



Since January 2006, the School for Peace, in partnership with the Hewar Center for Peace and Democracy, has been working on two major programs called “Change Agents” and

“Change Advocates.”

These programs are designed to bring together Jews and Palestinians who are working in important target sectors: mental health workers, journalists, educators, health care and social workers, lawyers and civil engineers, and thus create a cadre of committed leaders equipped with knowledge and tools to address issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The two programs have received \$1.1 million funding from the United State Agency for International Development (USAID). The “Change Agents” program was concluded in December 2006, while “Change Advocates” started in January 2008 and will continue until December 2009.

The programs address many of the most difficult issues of the conflict: language, land, rights, security, racism, superiority, inferiority and privilege. Participants gain a better understanding of the sources of conflict, and the ability to analyze more realistically factors that escalate conflict. The goals of the project include:

- training and empowering social change agents;
- contributing, through these agents, to meetings between members of both societies;
- building a culture of non-violence, moderation, respectful understanding and dialogue;
- promoting values that lead to equality, reconciliation and forgiveness inside and between Israeli and Palestinian communities.

Each group of professionals has encounters, starting with uni-national meetings to prepare for the binational meetings, which always take place outside the country, either in Jordan or Turkey, for 3 to 5 days. These meetings, a mixture of lectures and discussions,

allow the participants to get to know each other and think about the conflict in terms they sometimes haven't. They learn to consider the “other side” in a human rights perspective.

Usually, the dialogue in binational groups goes from honest – but very tense and painful – to an open discussion on what can be done. Then initiatives arise from the participants. The meetings are very powerful in that participants often discover aspects of the “other's” life they didn't know of.

Many joint projects have already emerged from the program that have had an impact and participants continue to seek ways to impact the society. For example, four educators from two schools - Jews and Arabs - initiated a program aimed at teaching the history of the “other”: *“The intention is not to compare the two histories or place them together for the purpose of historical examination, or is it to look at these events themselves as justifications for political decisions or events”* said one participant. *“Rather, we want to explore the ethical lessons present in these events and to promote understanding of how these events influence the feelings, outlook and attitudes of today's students.”*



Two journalists, Jewish and Arab, who work at an Israeli television station presented a proposal to their TV station for a new program that would focus on Jewish-Arab relations in Israel – relations now in crisis.

The group of healthcare professionals ran a medical services day in Jayyous, West Bank, serving 66 patients and arranging for follow-up appointments.

“It is impressive to see so many initiatives already started among the participants,” said Nava Sonnenschein, Project Director. *“The fact that the professionals keep participating in spite of the recent violence both in Israel and in the West Bank is also very encouraging.”*

Participants repeatedly report that they have acquired a leadership role with respect to Arab-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian issues at their places of employment. They raise challenging questions in an attempt to combat inequality or racism. They organize special trainings for co-workers. In short, they are functioning as agents of change in their societies.



“Advocates for Change: Israelis and Palestinians in Dialogue and Action” was made possible with the generous support of USAID and the American People in cooperation with the School for Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and Hewar Center for Peace and Development.

New Program at the Spiritual Center

At the end of 2007, the Spiritual Center started a new program called "Dirasat" referring to "studies" in Arabic and "interpretation" in Hebrew. *Dirasat* offers traditional and secular Jews, Christians and Muslims access to the text and tradition of the religious "other."

Participants study together and re-learn, analyze and reinterpret the texts of one's own tradition. Each academic year, the

Dirasat Program will consist of six seminars and a conference. The seminars will cover political/social issues within each faith tradition and between them. The lectures are presented in the speaker's mother tongue and translated into the other language.

The first seminar focused on feminism and Islam with Ms. Areen Hawari, a Palestinian Muslim and citizen of Israel, social, political and feminist activist. The second seminar approached the political interpretation of the image of

Jesus in Hebrew literature with Dr. Ktzia Alon, head of gender studies in the academic college of Beit Berl.

Dirasat is unique as it pays special attention to the challenged identity of minority groups within each society. This adds great depth to the center's



pluralistic approach by orienting it in two directions at once – outward to the other national group, and inward to minority

groups within one's own society and religion. The marginalized groups – including Palestinian Christians, Reform Jews, and Sufi Muslims, and women in all denominations – are religiously disadvantaged in Israel in various ways. The goal is to empower these groups to work together to leverage their tremendous untapped potential in the quest for peace and justice for all Jews and Palestinians. **We are currently seeking support for this program.**

Take advantage of NSWAS Hotel!

For your next trip to Israel, don't forget Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam's Hotel.

The Hotel is ideally situated in an area of natural beauty, in the heartland of Israel, within easy access of the Ben Gurion International Airport, Jerusalem, the coastal plain and scenic and historical sites.



The Hotel offers accommodation for the individual traveller, as well as a wide range of group programs, including brief introductions to the work of the village, seminars on peace and conflict-resolution work and alternative tourism.

To learn more and reserve your stay, go online at www.nswas.org/hotel.



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