

UNESCO RILA CALABASH COMMENTARIES

CRISIS IN PALESTINE: 'EID MUBARAK. FROM GAZA. FROM GLASGOW'

Palestine - Scotland: Creating Cultures of Sustainable and Inclusive Peace

By Nazmi Al-Masri and Alison Phipps

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“Salam and peace to you and to all people and to all Palestinians who are in need to live the peace and blessings of their Holy Homeland, and in the holy month of Ramadan and Eid.” Nazmi writes.

‘Awake all night and following all news through the thunderous and deafening sound of bombing. Lack of concentration, productivity, but hope and perseverance are our bread and butter in Palestine.

And so we will turn suffering into positive energy
Will turn the energy to determined resistance
Resistance to increasing productivity under pressure and pain
Productivity to artistic and culture-based creativity
Creativity to distinguished success
Success to inclusive tranquillity
Tranquillity to sustainable peace
Peace to prosperity to humanity.’

It’s over fourteen years since we started working together. Alison had been told Nazmi was an engineer and was sitting with him in a restaurant on Gibson Street, back in the day, trying to make the very little she knew about engineering stretch over a long meal with guests from Gaza.

Nazmi engaged politely until eventually he said “why are you talking to me about engineering. I’m an applied linguist.”

And then we were off in a conversation which was the catalyst for joint work which has spanned 3 wars against the Gaza Strip, countless sleepless nights of drone strikes, an attack on Alison’s home with a high velocity air rifle, and four incredibly precious, miraculous times when we could all meet.



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That's fourteen years of barely any chance of Nazmi leaving the Gaza Strip or, for Alison, of entering it. That's like fourteen years of lockdown with bombs and with nowhere for more than two million Palestinians, living in a caged corridor 6km by 45km, to run when the missile strikes begin. Last year we published an academic book out education under siege lead edited by Dr Giovanna Fassetta called Multilingual Online Academic Collaborations as Resistance documenting nearly a decade of online teaching under siege - it was well timed for the pandemic realities for all our students.

At present we are working together on an international project called Cultures of Sustainable and Inclusive Peace Network Plus. The project is funded from the Overseas Development Assistance budget of UK Government as part of the Government's own stated aim of ensuring the Sustainable Development Goals are met, and most especially that progress is made by the time COP26 comes to Glasgow. Face to face.

If anyone knows anything about building Cultures of Sustainable and Inclusive Peace, it is the Islamic University of Gaza in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The mutual success of winning research contracts to work on intractable problems as they manifest in the horrifying siege means we've been able to see and predict what might come in the future: the pandemic; the mental health epidemics; the need to care for those who have disabilities, the investment in youth employment, the work to give women strong societal roles in an inclusive yet culturally appropriate manner. And then to work of intercultural dialogue, building peace, day by day so it is a cultural way of living.

The participants in our project are mainly women (70-80%) selected from all Palestinian universities in Gaza. Development of online culturally based creative art workshops that reflect conflict transformation from a Palestinian protracted crisis context. This work aims to training workshops (30-hour each) and includes the hearing-impaired and young women with disabilities. The training develops participants' creative writing related to gender-based violence and/or coercion. By February this year, about 40 women had undergone training in short story writing for children in Arabic and in English and a competition had opened. The energy in workshops was incredible and the researchers where uncovering fresh dimensions to gender-based violence, under siege.



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Recently, the UK Government announced a 70% cut to the projects overnight. We were still in the throes of protesting these cuts when the full horror of the consequences of the desecration of al Aqsa mosque and evictions in Sheikh Jarrah turned to missiles raining down on our participants through the night. To cut the very work the UK Government seeks to highlight as part of its progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, not least when its focus is on women and girls, and conflict transformation through soft cultural diplomacy makes no sense. But it's another culture war. Another step on the easy road to war and away from the work of building, steadily, day by day, towards cultures of sustainable peace. Nazmi writes:

'I am sure after dark comes light and soon.

History teaches us this lesson and also no power or oppression remains forever.

The more oppression practices happen the faster the light comes.

I'm confident that this dark cloud of occupation will go or soon pass away and the sun of justice and freedom will rise in Palestine.'

Insh'allah. May it be so. So we might (will) meet, and have the work, dignity and possibility restored.

Eid Mubarak. From Gaza. From Glasgow.

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