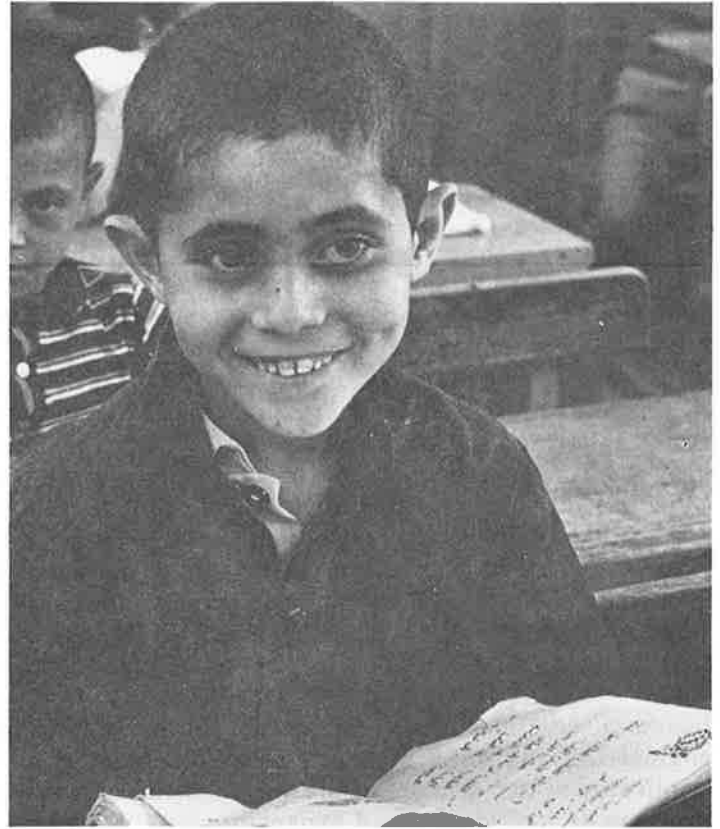


## EDUCATION...A KEY TO THE FUTURE

A nation's strength cannot be measured by its material wealth or the size of its army alone, but by the ability and fortitude of its people to pass down a shared history, culture, traditions, and a vision of progress to future generations. In this light, the Palestinians are indeed a strong and united nation. Through a limited, but sound education system in the Occupied Territories, Palestinians can shape their future and secure a place in the world.

Education also serves a more fundamental purpose. On its most basic level, education is a community service designed to meet each individual's demand to learn about himself and the world around him. In a region with few natural resources, people—with energy and training—are the source of wealth in the West Bank and Gaza. With hopes of expanding programs and facilities, then, educators in the Occupied Territories hope to coordinate the rich supply of educated Palestinians with the demands of a developing economy—training technicians as well as engineers, businessmen as well as mathematicians, and skilled farmers as well as agronomists.



## HISTORY

Palestinians have long placed a high premium on education. In the 1920's during the British Mandate, the number of schools increased from 171 in 1919-1920 to 555 by 1947-1948. Correspondingly, student enrollment rose tenfold during the same period. After 1950, administration of the education system was turned over to Jordan in the West Bank and to Egypt in Gaza. Accordingly, broad changes were introduced under these new authorities. For example, school attendance was made compulsory through the preparatory level (to age fifteen); and school programs were designed to be more attuned to the needs of society—teaching students agricultural and technical skills as well as providing a solid general education.

The 1967 war, followed by the Palestinians' second massive upheaval within twenty years, severely strained the education system. The movement of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the West Bank to the East Bank of Jordan and Gaza, created tremendous hardship on the young system. However, with the continued

help from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians refugees (UNRWA), refugee children were provided a sound education. Since it was established in 1949, UNRWA, in cooperation with UNESCO, has provided education, as well as health and welfare services to Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Territories, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Today, primary and preparatory education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are administered by three authorities—public, private, and UNRWA. The public, or government-supported school system, itself represents both Jordanian and Israeli educational requirements and restrictions. Families who can, often prefer to send their children to one of the many private schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Many of these schools were founded by European and American missionaries, but are now operated by Palestinian administrators and faculty, and attract both Muslim and Christian students.

While education throughout the world includes both public and private schools, the existence of an internationally administered system is unique to the Middle East. Over the years, UNRWA has become the source of

services to an estimated refugee population of 1.8 million living in five areas under four governments. Furthermore, despite UNRWA's budget difficulties, due to a decrease in contributions from the largest donors, such as the U.S., Britain, France and Belgium, the Agency currently operates 98 schools with 39,568 pupils in the West Bank and 141 schools with 77,345 pupils in Gaza. Conforming generally to the education policies of the Israeli government, UNRWA schools follow the Israeli curriculum, using Jordanian textbooks in the West Bank, and Egyptian in Gaza.

## STRUCTURE

At the end of six years of elementary and three years of preparatory schooling, students take the i'idad exam, which determines whether the student will continue onto the non-compulsory, secondary level of education. Secondary education is subdivided into General (academic) institutions, which attract most students, and Vocational schools. At the end of these three years, students sit for yet another exam, the Tawjihi, which is required and accepted throughout the Arab world for entrance into post-secondary institutions as well as being a great asset for youths seeking employment.

Post-secondary education in the Occupied Territories includes three secular universities in the West Bank, two Islamic universities, one of which is located in Gaza, and several vocational schools offering two-year programs in teaching, nursing and midwifery, and technical education. The three universities in the West Bank, Birzeit, the largest with 2061 students during the 1982-1983 academic year, Al-Najah National University and Bethlehem University, are patterned after the American university system. For example, each employs the use of credit hours and letter grading and offers a Bachelor degree in Arts and Sciences after four years of study. Among the departments and programs offered at one or more of these universities are history, economics, sociology, business administration, languages, natural and applied sciences, engineering and hotel management. While several of these fields are duplicated at two or more of the universities, there is a high demand for program diversification and expansion.



According to one study, 9,640 students took the Tawjihi and 7,010 passed in 1978 and were, therefore, eligible for admission to one of the post-secondary institutions in the Occupied Territories. The demand for higher education, however, is far greater than the supply. Each year approximately 1000 places open in the three universities combined and an additional 2000 spots are available in teacher training, nursing programs, or other vocational schools through the region. This means that over 40 percent of the qualified students are compelled to pursue their education abroad or not at all. While UNRWA provides a few scholarships for Palestinian refugees to study outside the Occupied Territories, many students without financial assistance are inevitably denied the opportunity to continue their studies entirely.

For many Palestinians, vocational training provides not only an alternative to university education, but a direct and essential service to the community as well. While the universities offer several non-degree vocational programs, government and private institutions operate the majority of teachers colleges, nurse and midwife, and technical training schools. By 1977, for example, there were seven teachers colleges in Gaza and the West Bank, four of which were administered by the government, and two in Ramallah operated by UNRWA. The nurses training programs which certify registered and practical nurses are primarily operated by private hospitals and schools. While technical training programs in agriculture, carpentry, mechanical and electrical engineering and sewing have the smallest overall enrollments in the vocational school system, there are eleven technical schools throughout the area.

## THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY

The difficult decisions faced by high school students throughout the world regarding their future education are even more difficult for Palestinians. The questions of where and what to study are not based solely on individual or professional issues, but are strongly influenced by the political and economic conditions which may be disadvantageous to university students. Although jobs are limited for highly educated Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the need for the graduates' skills is great. In one study citing the residence and employment trends of Birzeit graduates, researchers found that over one-third of the graduates remained in the West Bank, nearly half of whom were working in the field of education. The balance of graduates generally settled in other Arab countries in search of

more diverse employment. At the same time, students who study abroad tend to work abroad as well. Palestinians who have earned professional degrees in medicine or engineering for example, often remain abroad where salaries and employment opportunities are generally better. The hope of Palestinian educators, therefore, is to ensure that talented and trained young people who receive their education in the Occupied Territories will remain, putting their skills to the service of their communities.

If a student does decide to study in the West Bank, he may be confronted with additional obstacles. As in many regions throughout the world, the universities are often the center of confrontation. In the Occupied Territories, such confrontations have frequently led to the Israeli military government authorities closing various universities and educational institutions for short or extended periods. These actions have the effect of creating considerable uncertainty as to whether or not the students will complete their academic years of study. Another source of conflict between the authorities and the universities is Military Order 854, which regulates higher educational institutions' curriculum, faculty, student admissions and finances.

The possibilities for education elsewhere in the Arab world are also affected by the political climate. Following the 1977 Camp David Accords and the negative reaction of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, very few Palestinian students have been admitted to Egyptian universities which used to receive 90 percent of the qualified Gaza students. Likewise, although the situation in Lebanon is still very uncertain, it is clear that Palestinian students will have much greater difficulty than before in gaining admission to, or attending, educational institutions there.

Despite the genuine difficulties in providing comprehensive education to a homeless people, the Palestinian education system is fulfilling the needs of the community. Its success is due primarily to international concern for the well-being of the Palestinians, backed by the financial and organizational support of UNRWA and other private organizations. Finally, however, education in the West Bank and Gaza has made gains during the last sixteen years because of the strength and will of the Palestinian people, who know that education is a key to the future.





## ANERA'S SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

Given the pressing needs for education at all levels in Palestinian society, ANERA has supported programs from daycare through university training. Arab Women's Unions and charitable societies in Jerusalem, Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron and Gaza receive ANERA assistance for nursery schools, literacy and vocational training for women. Other vocational training programs for youth, such as the Industrial Islamic Orphanage and the Salesian School, and advanced training at the Arab College of Nursing and the Hebron Polytechnical school have been aided with general support and large project grants. Three universities, Birzeit, Bethlehem and Al Najah, have all received grants from ANERA in the past 15 years.

### YEMEN

ANERA has participated this year in a special emergency appeal to provide relief funds to 700,000 homeless victims of the earthquake that devastated the Yemen Arab Republic in December, 1982. ANERA cooperated with the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce to solicit disaster relief funds from over 500 corporations in the U.S.

*ANERA has received special gifts...*

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*In Honor of:* W. J. Harb ■ Our Blessed Lady.

*In Birthday Tribute to:* Paul Keneher

*In Tribute to:* The Holy Trinity ■ Palestinian orphans ■ Palestinian refugees.

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Contributions to ANERA are tax-deductible and should be sent with this form to the ANERA office. Thank you for your help.

*This issue of the ANERA Newsletter was written by Anne Crocker, ANERA Executive Assistant. All photos are by UNRWA.*

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