

# ANERA *Newsletter*

**FEDERAL EMPLOYEES**  
Look for ANERA code 0307 under International Service  
Agencies in your CFC leaflet.

American Near East Refugee Aid

Number 94 Summer 1991

## ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS *the West Bank and Gaza Strip*

The sun has just risen on another blistering summer day, greeting a familiar scene in the developing world. Children are already laughing and playing outside, running through the water in the center of the road as a mother keeps watch from a dwelling nearby. As the sun rises so too does the dust and the sound of car horns from increasing traffic. Donkeys, sheep, and chickens add to the general melee. A nauseating odor from uncollected garbage rotting in the summer heat mixes with the one seeping from the central attraction, the opaque water of an open sewer in which the children are playing. This could be a portrait of any child's life in the developing world. It is a portrait of Palestinian children's lives in the refugee camps and overcrowded cities of the Gaza Strip.

Ibtisam is a 7 year-old girl from Gaza. Her name means "smiling," and with good reason. She is lucky, having survived bouts of intestinal parasites and diarrhea caused by the open sewers and rotting garbage which weave a nasty trail throughout her refugee camp. We often forget that the severe dehydration caused by



**"You see children not only in the refugee camps, but also in Gaza City playing in sewage. You can't keep them away; there are too many young people in highly congested neighborhoods. It is a very serious situation."**

Dr. Rami Abdulhadi  
Center for Engineering and Planning

diarrhea can be fatal, especially for young children. Ibtisam will never forget; two younger brothers died of dehydration.

Ibtisam's home is one of the "temporary" refugee camps set-up in 1948, the same camps in which her parents and grandparents grew-up. Yet despite having lived in the camps, her mother makes little effort to stop children from playing in the sewer. She has witnessed, first as a child and then as a mother, the spread of cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and measles.

Extreme poverty and lack of even basic sanitation are partly responsible for environmental decay in the Gaza Strip. These problems are evident throughout the developing world. But the West Bank and Gaza Strip are different from other developing nations in one important respect: they are not under the authority of their own people. Palestinians cannot make plans to improve community health nor can they raise taxes to pay for any desired programs. Ibtisam's mother cannot keep her daughter healthy under these conditions.

Continued on page 2

*Solid waste disposal and sewers, potable water, improper pesticide use, and overcrowded urban living conditions* are the most compelling environmental problems in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But the real tragedy is that after 43 years these environmental menaces continue to relentlessly claim young lives. Yes, Ibtisam should smile. She has survived.



*With a population density of 5,000 persons per square mile, more crowded than Hong Kong, Palestinians in Gaza face growing public health problems.*

### ***Garbage and Waste***

Disposing of household and industrial garbage and human and animal waste, strain the inadequate sanitation services in many municipalities and villages. The squalor and filth is most conspicuous in the Gaza Strip. The Gaza municipality provides crews to pick up and dispose of garbage. However, the curfew imposed during the Gulf War suspended sanitation services for more than 30 days, leaving trash to rot in dumpsters and in the streets. Palestinians were confined to their homes along with their garbage. The dumpsters are often destroyed by the violence of the intifada. Municipal and village councils lack funds to replace them.

Garbage is hauled to dumps or processing plants outside the cities. Few are fenced, and children play in and around the garbage. Ironically, the dumps often provide a safe haven for these children from the ongoing violence in the streets. When the garbage is burned, high concentrations of organic materials pollute the chronically foul air. Workers need training to handle the waste properly. They pose a health risk to themselves, their families, and the community when they fail to wear gloves or take precautions.

### ***Land and Water***

Palestinian farmers, like farmers worldwide, use pesticides to protect their crops from destructive insects and

plant diseases. Without a department of agriculture or agricultural extension agents to offer advice and help design community policies, farmers often misuse these potentially toxic chemicals. They lack knowledge about safer pesticides or those that are banned in Europe and the U.S.

More importantly, a mouthful of olives, a bite of an apple or even a piece of kebab can have painful and often deadly side effects. Without proper washing, fruits and vegetables carry pesticides into homes, and into the mouths of hungry children. By eating unwashed foods and consuming animals which graze on treated areas, Palestinians get a double dose of pesticide exposure. Groundwater contamination from pesticides is also a serious concern. The vital issue of water will be discussed in a later newsletter.

ANERA works with Palestinian farmers to improve irrigation and land and water conservation techniques. ANERA also provides technical assistance to farmers to increase their awareness of the proper usage of pesticides and other chemicals, and to inform them of bans on fruits and vegetables treated with specific pesticides. The food children eat is healthier and farmers can increase exports and generate income when their produce conforms to international standards.

### ***Urban Pollution***

Towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are dirty and overcrowded. Municipal services are inadequate after twenty years of military occupation. The whirring of saws from the carpenter shops, rotting fruits and vegetables from small stalls, the clatter of tools and smell of black exhaust from mechanic shops, and stench of offal from a butcher's shop, all contribute to urban pollution. The scattered stands, shops and light industries strain inadequate sanitation services. The refuse attracts rats and other scavengers.

◆  
**ANERA has worked for 23 years  
 with local Palestinian organizations  
 to improve their environment,  
 and therefore their quality of life.**  
 ◆

There are no Palestinian-controlled zoning boards to clean up and regulate city growth. Homes are jammed side by side with dirty, noisy businesses. These sites become deadly playgrounds for children. ANERA has helped Palestinian municipalities and organizations clean up their towns and cities by funding *light industrial complexes, slaughterhouse projects, and wholesale fruit and vegetable markets*, located outside of residential areas. In

this way children like Ibtisam are given the key to healthier futures.

Lack of funds. Lack of authority. Unemployment. Pollution. Traffic congestion. These were the driving forces behind ANERA's joint project with the Ramallah Municipality to build a light industrial complex at the edge of town. Consolidating businesses in one location does more than clear the air of noise and smoke. Constructing and maintaining the building creates jobs. Rents from the individual units bring revenues to the municipality. Reduced traffic means fewer accidents. These parks need water, sewage and electrical systems which are otherwise difficult to construct. Revenues from the complex can expand and improve existing services.

In the open air, with flies and mosquitoes buzzing overhead, people shout and push to find the best produce at small market stands. Rotting eggplants, oranges, tomatoes, and grapes litter the ground. A child falls down, and getting up promptly rubs his sleepy eyes with dirty hands. Rats come out at night to eat the trampled leftovers.

This scene is disappearing in places like Halhoul and Tulkarem. ANERA has assisted each town's municipality

with the construction of fruit and vegetable markets in the city to improve the urban environment. The farmer or merchant can rent a stall, and distribute his produce in a cleaner environment. The municipalities collect rent and are responsible for the upkeep of the facility.

Palestinians reap rewards from this work far beyond increased revenues. Children play in safer environs; people breath cleaner air; and there is less disease, better health and the possibility of a more productive life for everyone. Ibtisam 's neighborhood has witnessed remarkable changes. Yes, the smells from the sewer and the garbage still fill the air. But the local produce vendors have moved to a nearby common market. Ibtisam sees fewer rats, the sidewalks are cleaner, and her mother no longer complains about the stench.

Giving Palestinians control over their own affairs would dramatically improve the environmental situation in the occupied territories. Environmental degradation knows no borders. For significant improvement of all environmental problems, notably water, a lasting Arab-Israeli peace is required. ♦



## THIS SCENE CAN CHANGE

Gaza carpets are famous for their vibrant colors and durability. Ibtisam knows about these rugs. She sees two men dying wool each day as she walks to school. As she hurries past the small, dirty workshop to avoid the steamy rivulets of colored water, the beauty of the finished carpets contrasts sharply with the sounds and smells of production. But this scene can change. The vile smells and deafening noises of other area industries could be banished as well. Light industrial parks and well-designed common retail areas will help clean up Ibtisam's neighborhood and the urban environment.

**ANERA has received gifts...**

**In Honor of:**

Joseph DePinto ■ Paul Findley's birthday ■ Hiba Galeb ■ Dr. Raymond Haddad ■ Marcia Karas ■ Maya George Khadine ■ Yassar Safadi obtaining his master's degree ■ Edward Said ■ Ethel Sanjines ■ Ms. Estelle M. Smith ■ Burton B. Thurston ■ Theodore H. Tofte ■ Concetta Vandegriff ■ Dr. David B. Weaver's birthday ■ Zakat ■ Jesus Christ ■ Hungry families in Gaza ■ the Intifada ■ Palestinians ■ Palestinian Independence ■ Palestinians in Kuwait ■ Peace in the Middle East ■ War victims

**In Memory of:**

Josephine Zoghibe Ablan ■ Edna N. Adomeit ■ Carver Blanchard ■ Dr. Vaughn E. Crawford ■ the parents and husband of Mrs. Madaline Cross ■ Harry Davis ■ John Davis ■ the parents of Miss Violet V. Hyder ■ Marion L. Field ■ Heinz & Else Kappes ■ Hanna Kollo ■ Tom Magill ■ Craig Mansour's birthday, July 22, may his soul rest in peace ■ Emily Mansour ■ LTC William G. Powell ■ Phyllis Sutton

Sibyl Totah Belmont of Lexington, Massachusetts

**Congratulations on the marriages of:**

Jill Hough and David Corey ♦ Dr. Tonya Schuster and Dr. David Smith  
Thank you to their friends and family who, through gifts to ANERA, have shared the joy of these marriages with others in the world.

**Enclosed is a gift for ANERA's projects in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Lebanon.**

\_\_\_ \$15 \_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_ \$1000

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to provide a 1-year scholarship for a child in Gaza. (\$100 per child)\*

I would like to provide a 1-year scholarship for a child in Beirut. (\$100 per child)\*

I would like to provide a 1-year scholarship for a child in East Jerusalem. (\$100 per child)\*

\*Sponsors receive a photo of the child and a letter from the school during the year.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ I want my gift to help feed hungry families in Gaza.



*Written by Maggie Gran, ANERA Administrative Assistant. (Photos courtesy of UNRWA.) Best wishes to Tom Webster, that helpful voice who answers the phone. He is leaving to be an intern with the Galilee Society for Health and Research, a Palestinian organization in Israel that improves community access to health care. We welcome his replacement, Catherine Sweet, a recent graduate in Government and Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University.*



1522 K Street, N.W. #202  
Washington, D.C. 20005

**ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS:**

*the West Bank and Gaza Strip*

Nonprofit Organization  
**U.S. POSTAGE PAID**  
Permit No. 8530  
Washington, D.C.

ADDRESS CORRECTION  
REQUESTED & RETURN  
POSTAGE GUARANTEED

ANERA OFFICERS, 1990-1991  
The Hon. Lucius D. Battle, Chairman  
Dr. Peter Gubser, President  
Ms. Jane W. Schweiker, Treasurer