

No Peace in Sight *By Doris Warrell*

This article was written following project field visits in February by Peter Gubser and Doris Warrell.

As we stood at the military checkpoint at the entrance to Jericho, blocked by an exceptionally large concrete barrier and two tanks positioned nearby, Peter Gubser, ANERA's President, observed, "This is the worst I have seen in twenty years." Our entire visit reinforced this observation.

Ordinary Palestinians are adapting to the increasing difficulties in their day-to-day lives. Wedding celebrations normally lasting late into the night now end at 9:00 pm so people can get home safely. Visiting relatives or friends in the evening is infrequent because of violence, checkpoints or terrible road conditions. Getting to school is precarious for both students and their drivers.

Adults and children alike must gauge the situation daily, sometimes hourly, to decide if it is safe to conduct normal activities. At the Palestinian Women's Union kindergarten in Rafah, Gaza, only 73 of 120 students are attending classes.

Most shopping areas are open during the day although a noticeable number of stores remain closed. This is especially true in tourist areas. One souvenir store, located outside a major tourist hotel in Jerusalem, only opens when the hotel has a tour group, and had only opened once in the previous two weeks. In Bethlehem, normally a popular destination for tourists, the situation is worse since many stores have remained closed for weeks.

Hunger is increasing among children. Food supplies are available, but many people do not have enough money to buy food. Vulnerable families are referred to local charitable organizations that help them purchase food or pay utility bills. At youth centers, women's centers and schools in Gaza, Jerusalem and Hebron, I saw long lists filled with the names of families needing help.

Schools are trying to find ways to feed hungry students. Geraldine Shawwa, President of the Atfaluna Center for Deaf Children in Gaza, is seeking funding for a lunch program for her 120 students.

Throughout Palestine, institutions are caught in a crisis of decreased funding amid spiraling needs. "[Our students' parents] prefer to buy food rather than pay school fees," said Yusra Barbari, President of the Palestine Women's Union in Gaza. Income from businesses, run for the benefit of institutions, has largely disappeared. Donations from abroad are keeping institutions open and allowing them to provide services to children who have never lived through such hard times.

Institutions are adapting to the travel restrictions. The National Conservatory of Music in Ramallah, West Bank has resumed its classes. When I visited, the building was filled to capacity with students, teachers and a visiting quartet from the United States. After canceling the fall concert series and many classes, the Conservatory is again offering music to both students and the community. However, like all the institutions I visited, it is operating under harsher, more costly circumstances. The Conservatory's program in Bethlehem is continuing, but is

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Students at a kindergarten in the Jabalia Refugee Camp in Gaza receive milk and cereal donated by ANERA.

geographically isolated from its activities in Ramallah.

The Gaza Women's Loan Fund (GWLF), like the Conservatory, is finding creative ways to continue providing services. To reach clients, staff navigate road barriers and Israeli military checkpoints that separate Gaza into northern, middle and southern zones. Like thousands of Gaza residents, the loan officers live in one zone and work in another. Not surprisingly when events unexpectedly flare up, visits with borrowers are often rescheduled or cancelled. Borrow-

ers face similar constraints when they struggle to reach the bank to make repayments.

The GWLF is providing loans, but at a significantly reduced scale and primarily to businesses that do not require traveling. During times of curfew imposed by the Israeli military, people sometimes have only two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening to conduct business or run errands. "It will take a long time, not just one or two



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With barely enough business to keep them going, Um Al'a, a Gaza Women's Loan Fund borrower, and Abu Al'a had to let go four employees.

months, for households to recover from the current economic situation," said Women's Credit Special-

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ist Wafa Katba. Meanwhile the GWLF is doing its utmost to provide capital to small businesses that generate income for families.

An immediate result of the disturbances over the past months is the depletion of medicine and medical supplies in local hospitals and clinics. Since late September, the Al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron, West Bank, has treated over 450 victims of violence, most of whom were seriously injured. As the number of patients rose, hospital storerooms emptied. Through the Palestine Emergency Fund, ANERA has given over \$120,000 in cash grants to hospitals and clinics. It has also provided medicines and medical supplies valued at over \$3.5 million to help re-stock shelves at medical facilities, like the Al-Ahli Hospital, across the West Bank and Gaza.

ANERA's staff is also adapting to the situation and spending additional staff time checking on construction progress and getting supplies, like irrigation pipes, to project sites. Getting into Jerusalem, where ANERA's main office is located, is extremely difficult and sometimes prohibited by the Israeli government. To provide more efficient services, ANERA opened an office in Halhoul, near Hebron, West Bank. This southern office allows staff members, unable to reach Jerusalem,

to work near communities where ANERA is improving kindergartens, health clinics and access roads.

Today, almost 50% of all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live below the poverty line of \$2.10 per day. According to the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, since the beginning of the crisis 350,000 additional Palestinians have fallen into poverty. Today one million people, one in every three Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, live in poverty.

To address the current 50% unemployment rate, ANERA is seeking funding for labor-intensive employment programs for Palestinians in the most affected areas. As families are plunged into poverty, the pressure on schools, hospitals and businesses will increase. ANERA is working to preserve families' dignity and self-sufficiency as local institutions are being overwhelmed with requests for help.

Despite current conditions, projects continue. In March, over 3000 people began benefiting from the potable water network installed in the Ein Sultan Refugee Camp next to Jericho. Ninety percent of this project was completed after the new intifada began. ANERA helped residents establish a water users association to manage this new resource.

After witnessing the success of ANERA's projects in the face of adversity, Peter Gubser said, "People can do a lot for themselves when they have the tools to do so." This is definitely a time of great need. The challenge is to gather the resources and tools necessary to work with people to meet their growing and urgent needs. ❁

In Memory Of Isam Shawwa

Isam Rushdi Shawwa, a longtime friend and the first director of ANERA's Gaza office, died in February at the age of 79.

Mr. Shawwa was a founding member of the Society for the Preservation of Antiquities and National Heritage; co-founder of the Tuberculosis Hospital in the Bureij Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip; founder of the Al-Amal Orphanage in Gaza; member of the Board of Trustees – Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI); and, founding member of the Gaza Sporting Club. Mr. Shawwa began his many years of public service in 1944 with the British War Department in Palestine as administrator of Jenin and Gaza districts in Palestine. He also worked for UNESCO, Kuwait Oil Company, and the Gaza Municipality. He directed ANERA's Gaza office from 1984 to 1994.

Mr. Shawwa attended the at International College in Beirut, the American University of Beirut, the Government Law School in Jerusalem, and Henley Administrative Staff College in Oxfordshire, U.K..

He is survived by his wife Geraldine Shawwa, President of the Atfaluna Center for Deaf Children, and his children. ❁

Virginia Dimsey



A doctor checks on a critically injured patient at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza, which received donated medicine and medical supplies through ANERA.

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Jordanian School Joins Scholarship Program

In March ANERA began offering financial assistance to needy students at The Holy Land Institute for the Deaf (HLID) in Salt, Jordan. According to Peter Gubser, ANERA's President, "We wanted to extend ANERA's work in Jordan. After seeking recommendations and making on-site visits, we decided that not only does the HLID run a high quality educational program, but its children are among the neediest in Jordan."

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Students gather outside their classroom during a break between classes.

Approximately 150 deaf or severely hearing impaired students, ages 4-20, follow a kindergarten through twelfth grade curriculum, as well as specialized vocational programs. Since a large number of students live far from Salt, or have family circumstances that make living at home difficult, a large boarding home for 120 children is located next to the school.

Founded in 1964, the HLID provides rehabilitation, education, vocational training, and other services for deaf and disabled people. It is also a leading advocate in the region for children with disabilities. By addressing disability education from multiple levels, the HLID assists deaf and disabled students in becoming mature, self-reliant, well-integrated, and productive adults. "The children are alert, well-cared for and happy. The dedication of the teachers and the support services provided by the Institute will help these children assume a valuable place in Jordanian society. Now we have to get busy and support these kids", said Doris Warrell, Scholarship Program Director. ❁

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