



NEWSLETTER

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No. 2 (April 1996)

FROM THE DIRECTOR

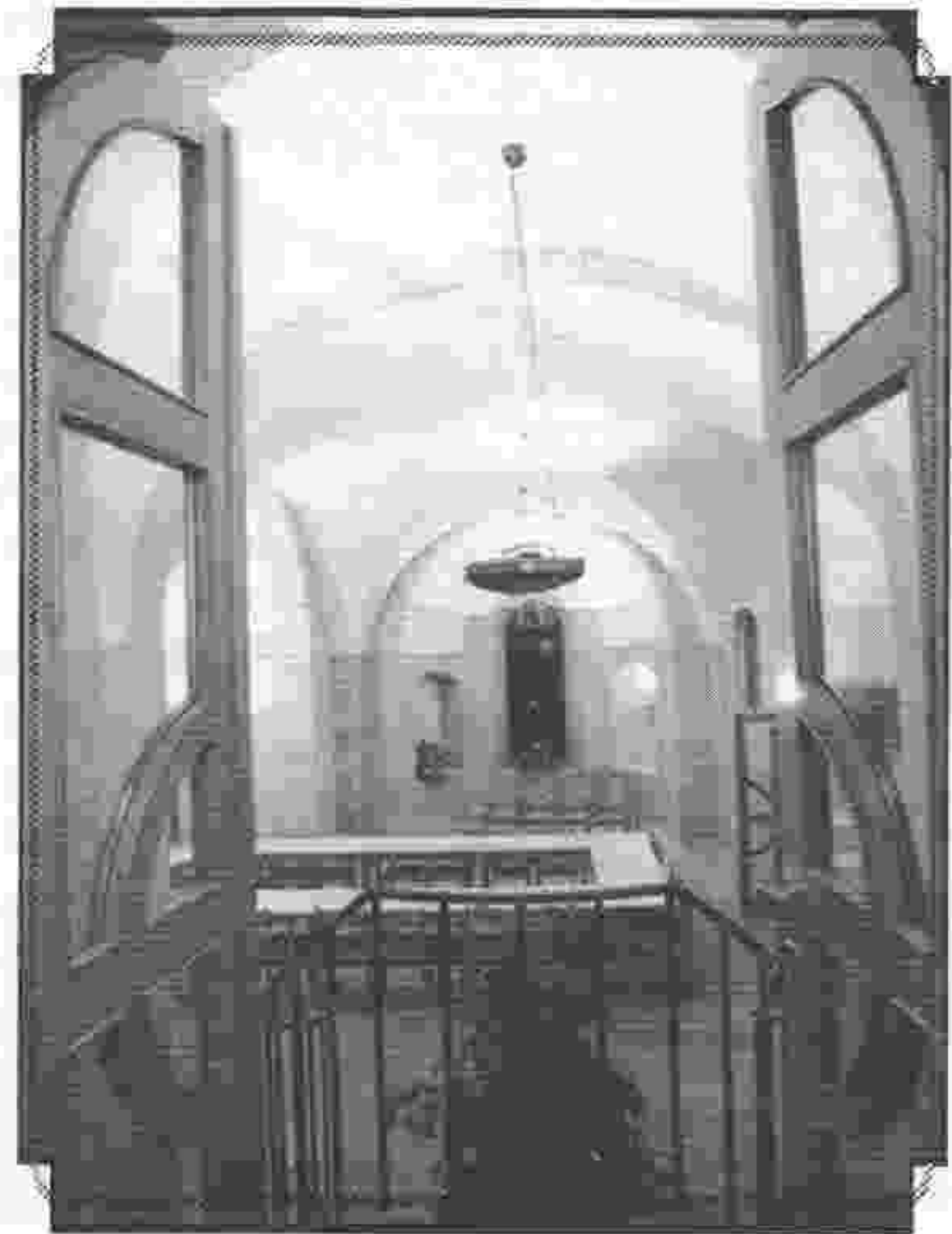
Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

Dear Friends,

The last six months have been full of immense jubilation and sadness for Palestinians. For the first time in 29 years we celebrated Christmas under Palestinian authority, after the withdrawal and re-deployment of the Israeli troops on the 21st of December. The joy that the Palestinians experienced on that day was similar to that experienced at a great wedding banquet. However, like any marriage, it is the everyday life which follows the wedding party that determines the success or failure of that marriage. Thus, despite re-deployment, evidence of real change has been slow in coming.

The assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin by the Jewish extremist Yigal Amir, while it did not halt the peace process at the time, showed the extreme opposition to peace among some Jewish groups. The Palestinian Legislative Council elections, which were held in January, demonstrated that the majority of the Palestinians were actually voting for peace. The outcome of the elections and the presence of an international observers' team gave Yasser Arafat constitutional and international legitimacy. However, the recent series of suicide bombings by members of the military wing of Hamas has interrupted the peace negotiations. It is interesting that both Yigal Amir and the suicide bombers belong to movements that hold extremist religious views.

To be cont. page 7



CONTENTS

- From The Director
- *Ma Al-Salama Wa Ahlan Wa-Sahlan*
(Farewells & Greetings)
- Palestinian Elections
- Closure & its Repercussion
- Visitors
- Center's Activities
- Center's Publications

MA AL-SALAMA WA AHLAN WA-S AHLAN

FAREWELLES & GREETINGS

Rifat Odeh Kassis, who has been responsible for the reintegration program at the Center, is leaving us for two years to go to Kyrgystan, a former Soviet Republic in Central Asia. He will be working with the Dutch Inter-Church Aid to help develop NGOs there. In addition to his work at the Center, Rifat has been working since 1989 with the YMCA as the head of the rehabilitation program.

Fred Strickert (Ph.D.), his wife Gloria, and their daughter Rachel left us after they stayed at the Center for six months as volunteers and short term missionaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Throughout their stay, they resided in Abu Gubran Guest house, the guest house of the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and provided assistance and expertise to the guest house, Center, and congregation.

Fred, a professor of religion, is on a one-year sabbatical from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa and is currently a Senior Fellow at the W. F. Albright Institution in Jerusalem. He is also the co-director of Bethsaida Archeological Excavations-Galilee. Fred's association with our center started in 1988 when he began to bring student groups from the United States of America to Palestine and Israel to tour and study.

During his six-month stay in Bethlehem, Dr. Fred worked in the area of alternative tourism, co-authoring with Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and Photographer Garo Nalbandian an alternative guide book on Bethlehem for the *Bethlehem 2000* project. While most visitors see a limited view of Bethlehem, perhaps only the Church of the Nativity, this book will provide a comprehensive picture of the rich heritage of the whole Bethlehem area, connecting historical information with contemporary issues of our important city.

Gloria is on leave from her position as a Chaplain and is in the final stage of preparation for Diaconal ministry in the ELCA. Her volunteer work here, which is part of her fieldwork requirements, was multi-faceted. She worked with the guest house staff on daily chores, participated in producing the first English Newsletter of the Center, helped host groups, and did English correspondence. As a former youth director, Gloria enjoyed weekly fellowship and prayer time with a group of confirmation students from the Christmas Church. In addition, she learned about the history, social role, and preparation of Arabic food. Several years ago the idea of authoring an Arabic cookbook in English was the dream of Gloria and Najwa Raheb.

With Najwa's teaching and advice Gloria compiled several recipes and wrote a book that will not give recipes only, but will hopefully be a way for our guests to relive their experience of Palestinian Culture through taste. This book will also enable others to learn about the wonderful Palestinian tradition of hospitality, which any visitor to Palestine experiences.

Ahlan Wa-Sahlan



Khoulood Daibes-Abu Dayyeh received her Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Hannover in Germany. She specialized in conservation strategies for preserving Palestinian architectural heritage. She is currently working in the Faith and Development department and is involved in the reintegration program and the *Bethlehem 2000* project. She also works for *Riwaq Center* for Architectural Conservation in Ramallah, which is concerned with conserving important land marks in Palestine.



Nuha Khoury received her Ph.D. in Islamic History from The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She returned to Palestine through our reintegration program and is currently working in the Projects and Research department.



Tanja Tabbara studied Middle Eastern Studies and law at the Free University of Berlin, Germany. She has a Masters degree in Law and is working now in the Faith and Development department as well as the German-Palestinian exchange department.



A READING OF THE PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

Suleiman Abu Dayyah

The first parliamentary elections in Palestinian history were held in January 20, 1996. The political scope of these elections was limited and the authority of the elected Legislative Council restricted. However, from a subjective point of view and in comparison to the experiences of some other nations, these elections were conducted in a democratic, free, and fair manner. The elections came as a fulfillment of the Oslo 1 & 2 agreements. They also were in accordance with Palestinian demands that insisted on having them held to give the Palestinian negotiators legal and popular authorization, an authorization that is particularly necessary for conducting the final-phase negotiations.

The reaction of the Palestinian people to these elections was positive. The enthusiasm with which the election campaigns and debates were received, and the control exercised during the voting process has shown that clearly. The large turn-out is a further manifestation of the wide support for the political option as well as the democratic nature of the majority of the Palestinian population.

Voting rights and Participation in the Elections:

Around one million Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip registered to vote for the president of the Palestinian Authority and the eighty-eight legislative council members. 68.5% of those who had the right to vote exercised that right. The distribution of these voters and their voting districts was as follows:

Jerusalem	One voting district	80,000 voters
The West Bank	Ten Voting districts	590,000 voters
The Gaza Strip	Five voting districts	350,000 voters

40% of the total registered voters, who casted their ballots in 1696 polling stations, were women. 27 of the 674 candidates who ran for the eighty-eight seats were also women. Samiha Khalil, a woman, was the only candidate to run against Yasser Arafat for the presidency of the Legislative Council.

Voting Rules:

The elections were held according to majority rule and not according to proportional representation, as was demanded by the opposition forces. Some of these forces, though, ended up participating in the elections. According to the rules, any one above the age of eighteen had the right to vote and any one over the age of thirty had the right to run for elections. For each voting district there were specific numbers of seats. For example, the Bethlehem district was limited to four seats for which 29 candidates ran. The four candidates with the highest number of votes won. Of the four winners two were returnees, who were allowed by the Israeli government to return to the Bethlehem area after the signing of the Oslo agreement. Out of the 88 Council seats, 6 were designated for Christian Palestinians. This was according to the following division:

Jerusalem district	2 seats
Bethlehem district	2 seats
Ramallah district	1 seat
Gaza city	1 seat

In addition to the Christian seats, one seat was also reserved for the Samaritan minority in the Nablus district.

Participation in the Elections:

Several political parties and factions participated in the elections, including Fatah, Palestinian People's Party (PPP), Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA), Democratic National Coalition, Palestine Popular Struggle Front, and a large number of independent candidates. Some of these independent candidates were affiliated with Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), or the Islamic forces. According to the Oslo agreement, the Palestinians in the Diaspora were excluded from these elections. Rather, only the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were to participate. This exclusion was one of the most important criticisms leveled by the opposition against the elections. The PLO, which considered the Palestinians in the Diaspora to be represented by the PNC (Palestinian National Council), argued that when circumstances allow elections will be held for them at an appropriate time and place.

Elections' Results:

Yasser Arafat, the first Palestinian president to be elected directly and democratically received 88.7% of the vote, while his opponent Samiha Khalil acquired 11.3%. As for the Legislative Council elections' results, they were as follows:

Fatah (the national list)	
59% of the votes	52 seats
Fatah (independent)	
17.5%	15 seats
Independent	
21.5%	19 seats
Democratic National Coalition	
1%	1 seat
Palestinian Democratic Union	
1%	1 seat

The 88-elected Council members, of whom five are women, have automatically gained membership to the Palestinian National Council. However, this number does not reflect the number of seats that are reserved for the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the PNC, which is 186 seats.

The Opposition and the Elections:

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad have all boycotted the elections. This boycott was the result of their rejection of the Oslo agreements, which they considered them to contradict the consecutive resolutions of the Palestinian National Council. According to the Opposition, these agreements will not lead to a total Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The parties that participated in the elections, other than Fatah, were also critical of these elections.

First, they criticized the injustice of the election law, which they considered it favor the large parties over the smaller ones. Second, they opposed the division of the country to 16 electoral districts instead of one. Third, they criticized the official media's bias to the Palestinian Authority. Fourth, they criticized the limited time assigned for people to lodge their complaints against the election law. Finally, they pointed to the violations committed, the neglect demonstrated in applying the election law, and the manner in which the ballots were counted during election day. However, in spite of all the criticisms, these elections have given the Palestinian Authority democratic legitimization and have irreversibly moved the Palestinian people from the revolutionary stage to state-building.

ISRAEL'S ANSWER TO THE SERIES OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS

Viola Raheb

During the last few weeks, Israel and Palestine have experienced a great deal of violence. After the assassination of Hamas activist Yahya Ayyash, by the Israeli Mosad in Gaza, a new wave of violence erupted. Starting on February 25th a series of suicide bombings took place in Israel, where many innocent people lost their lives. The first attack on a bus in West Jerusalem was condemned by the majority of the Palestinian people as well as by the Palestinian authority. These bombings were not directed only towards the Israeli government and people, but also towards the majority of the Palestinian people and the peace process itself. The extreme reaction of the Israeli government was one of collective punishment, where the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were placed under "closure." For the majority of outsiders the term "closure" is understood to mean the prohibition of the Palestinians from entering Israel and Jerusalem. However, this term has taken on a new meaning in the past few weeks; it has also come to mean the closing off of the cities and villages of the West Bank from each other. This new type of closure was made possible by the Oslo 2 Agreement, which divided the West Bank into three zones.

These zones are: Zone A under Palestinian authority, Zone B under joint Palestinian-Israeli authority, and Zone C under Israeli authority. In the last three weeks, the Oslo 2 Agreement has been used to punish instead of help Palestinians. It seems that the Israeli government did not change its opinion of the Palestinian people as a whole and is still treating every Palestinian as a potential terrorist.

Palestinians have been hit very hard by the closure, which had a dehumanizing effect. The unemployment rate, which before the closure was around 55% in the West Bank, has risen to 70%.

Since the majority of people work in areas different than the ones they live in, many lost their jobs. Educational institutions have also been affected. All Palestinian universities were forced to close for more than three weeks, since most of the faculty and students were barred from entering the areas where these universities exist. The same has also been true for schools, although now teachers and students have started making up lost time by going to schools that are within their immediate living areas.

The transportation of food supplies, agricultural goods, and medical supplies has also been affected by the closure. At the same time, food prices have risen due to the shortages that resulted. Thus, the most important issue that the Palestinians have faced in the last few weeks has been one of survival. At a time when Palestinians are eager to feel the positive effects of peace on the quality of their life, they are experiencing mostly negative ones. Although many analysts foresee a change after the Israeli elections, the important question is whether the Palestinians would be able to wait until then.



VISITORS

On Oct. 7th, 1995 Dr. Manfred Rissman, vice president of the Meklenburg-Vorpomern parliament, and Johann Sheringer, vice president, and Dr. Bernd Loscher, chief of protocol, visited the Center. The theme of their visit was the peace process and the possibility of cooperation between Palestine and Germany, especially in the area of youth exchange.

During the Christmas season we were visited by Dr. and Mrs. Alexandros Papaderos, General Director of the Orthodox Academy of Crete. This visit came upon an invitation that was extended to the couple by Dr. Raheb during the consultation visit of the Center's staff to the Academy last July. During both visits there was a discussion of the areas and possibilities of cooperation between the two institutions, other than the youth exchange which has started in 1993.



On December 24th, ten days after Bethlehem was turned over to the Palestintian Authority, Mrs. Suha Arafat visited our Center. She also attended the Christmas Eve Service at the Christmas Service at the Evangelical Christmas Lutheran Church.

On March 1st, 1996 we were visited by Ms. Monika Mundkowski-Bek, Director of the Division for Cooperation with Developing Countries for the state of Baden-Württemberg, and Mr. Schneider, who is responsible for Palestine and North Africa. During their visit they had the chance to attend a staff meeting and got an idea about our work.

On January 30th, 1996 we received a delegation of German politicians and journalists led by Mrs. C. Nolte, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth. During their visit the delegation met with Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, general director of the Center, and the Center employees. The delegation also met with representatives of various youth groups and discussed several issues relating to the youth work in Palestine. The youth representatives stressed the importance of their work, in light of the social and political situation we live in, and asked the minister for her support in encouraging German-Palestinian youth exchanges. The meeting ended with an Arabic lunch served by the Church's guest house.



From January 28 to February 1, the International Center of Bethlehem hosted a group of 30 youth Pastors from Dresden, Germany. Together, we explored possibilities of youth exchange between Germany and Palestine. The visit included a meeting with President Yasser Arafat in Gaza as well as with the Minister of Youth in Ramallah city.



On March 20, 1996 a delegation from the Lutheran World Federation visited our Center and had a working luncheon where the Lutheran communion in Israel-Palestine was discussed. Among those who attended the luncheon were Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary, Lutheran World Federation (LWF); The Right Reverend Naim Nassar, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan; The Right Reverend Bjorn Bue, Bishop of the Diocese of Stavanger, Church of Norway; Mr. F. Andreas Havinga, Assistant Editor (English), Office for Communication Services, LWF; Reverend Rudolf Hinz, Director, Department for World Service, LWF; Dr. Edmund Ratz, member of the Board for Church Cooperation and World Service, Germany; and Reverend Munib Younan, President of Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Cont. from page 1

The misuse of religion and its utilization for political ends is not new. Two years ago, and after the massacre perpetrated in the Abrahamic mosque in Hebron by the Jewish extremist Baruch Goldstein, we tried to draw the attention to the phenomenon of religious extremism. We asked people to re-evaluate some of their religious and biblical convictions in order to address the issue of using religion for narrow political objectives. For example, the biblical story of Samson, as well as those of other religious heroes, must be critically examined for the messages they convey. For real peace to be established in the area, it is necessary to eliminate from the three monotheistic religions the dangerous traditions that encourage killing in the name of God and replace them with those that stress inclusiveness and peaceful coexistence.

We, at The International Center of Bethlehem, recognize that the road to peace is long and full of difficulties. However, by providing a forum for democratic dialogue and by giving voice to the voiceless we are determined to be part of the solution. Therefore, we keep on telling our story to many groups and delegations that visit us with the aim of emphasizing the power of logic at a time when the logic of power dominates.

The response of the Israeli government to the latest bombings has been harsh and unjustified. The government has launched a series of collective punishments and has closed off Palestinian cities and villages from Israel as well as from one another. The attempt at isolating the Palestinians has turned our areas of residence into big prisons and held us captives within our own homeland. At the moment the Palestinians are held hostages by the Israeli parties, who use them to demonstrate their hawkishness and right-wing credentials in preparation for the Knesset elections this coming May. It is our belief that the state-terrorism that Israel is practicing against the Palestinian people is causing the deterioration of the peace process and is destroying the atmosphere of good will in the region.



A LOOK BACK AT THE CENTER'S ACTIVITIES OF THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

LECTURE SERIES

The Department for Women's Studies at the International Center of Bethlehem organized a series of lectures during the month of December as part of its monthly public lectures.

This series focused on different aspects of the Palestinian elections that were held on January 20, 1996. The first lecture, entitled *Women and Elections*, dealt with women's rights in these elections and the issue of quotas for women. It was given on December 1st by attorney at law, Salwa Abu Hashish. The second lecture, held on December 8th, was on *The Rights of the Disabled and Elections*. Ms. Angela Gaff, a lawyer at al-Haq institution, spoke about the need to have special provisions for the disabled within the election law and to provide facilities to enable them to vote. The third lecture was given on December 15th by Carl Lidbom, the Chairman of the International Observers at the Palestinian elections. His lecture was entitled *The Role of the International Observers in the Palestinian Elections*.



A series of panel discussions between the candidates who ran for elections in the Bethlehem area was also sponsored by the International Center of Bethlehem. Out of the 29 persons who ran for the elections, 16 participated in these discussions. They presented their campaign platforms and answered questions from the audience.



The panel discussions were held for three days, between January 15-18, and approximately 300 people attended each day.



LITERATURE EVENINGS & LANGUAGE COURSES

Among the activities that the Center sponsors is the German Literature evenings, which take place the second Wednesday of each month. During these evenings the participants discuss literary works, watch videos, or listen to music. Another activity that is sponsored by the Center is a German language class for beginners, which is held every Tuesday and Friday of the week. Currently there are ten students enrolled in the class.

SYMPOSIUM OCTOBER 1 - 8, 1995

Ten German and Swiss scholars arrived at the International Center of Bethlehem and spent a week with local Christian and Muslim Palestinian scholars and clergy discussing various aspects of Palestinian Contextualized Theology. Topics such as religious education, inter-religious dialogue, the meaning of election and "The Promise Land," and ecumenism and faith in the Palestinian context were all discussed. The symposium was planned primarily by Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and Dr. Ottmar Fuchs, professor at Bamberg University in Germany.



The significance of this symposium lies in the fact that it was the first of its kind to take place in the West Bank since the 1967 Israeli occupation. Earlier conferences on Palestinian contextual theology were held outside of Palestine.



The German delegation, led by Sheik Al-Ja'hari, having a discussion with the Israeli soldiers at the Abraham Mosque in Hebron

CONFERENCES

Rana Khoury participated in the following conferences:

- 1- Oct. 6-8, 1995. Sponsored by the Academy of Loccum, Germany. Theme: "Eros of Dispute: Ethics From a Feminist Perspective."
- 2- November 14-17, 1995. Sponsored by the Tantur Ecumenical Center, Jerusalem. Theme: "Women of Faith: Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Women in Culture and Society."

Viola Raheb participated in the following conferences:

- 1- Sept. 28-30, 1995. Sponsored by the Selbsthilf-Förderung, Ausländischer Bürger e.v., Berlin. Theme: "Peace and the Politics of Development in Palestine."
- 2- Nov. 13-15, 1995. Sponsored by the Evangelical Church in Germany. Held at Loccum, Germany. Theme: "Contribution of Islam and Christianity to Peace."
- 3- Nov. 18, 1995. Sponsored by The Coordinating Office of Ecumenism Mission and Development in Bern, Switzerland. Theme: "Palestinian Contextual Theology."
- 4- Nov. 19-24, 1995. Series of lectures with the Christian peace Movement in Switzerland.
- 5- Dec. 8, 1995. Sponsored by the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Oslo. Theme: "Women, Religion, and Human Rights."

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb participated in the following conferences:

- 1- Nov. 2-8, 1995. Sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, Asia Desk-Taiwan. Theme: "Church Policy in Asia."
- 2- Nov. 22, 1995. Sponsored by ICRPI in Jerusalem. Theme: "Religion and State in Israel."
- 3- Jan. 11-13, 1995. Sponsored by Stockholm School of Theology, Sweden. Theme: "Church, Bible, and Israel."



YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM

A group of 20 young Germans, led by Rev. Heinrich Schomann, were hosted by our Center from Nov. 6th to 7th, 1995. Joined by a group of Palestinian youths, the German group participated in a program that included volunteer work, sightseeing, and lectures.

Lakisa Group: For ten days between December 27, 1995 to January 6, 1996 a group of fifteen youth representatives, eight Palestinians and seven Germans, participated in a youth exchange seminar. The seminar focused on intercontextual issues and preparing youth to assume leadership roles in their respective societies. In May, 1996 the Palestinian group will be hosted by the German one in Stuttgart, Germany.

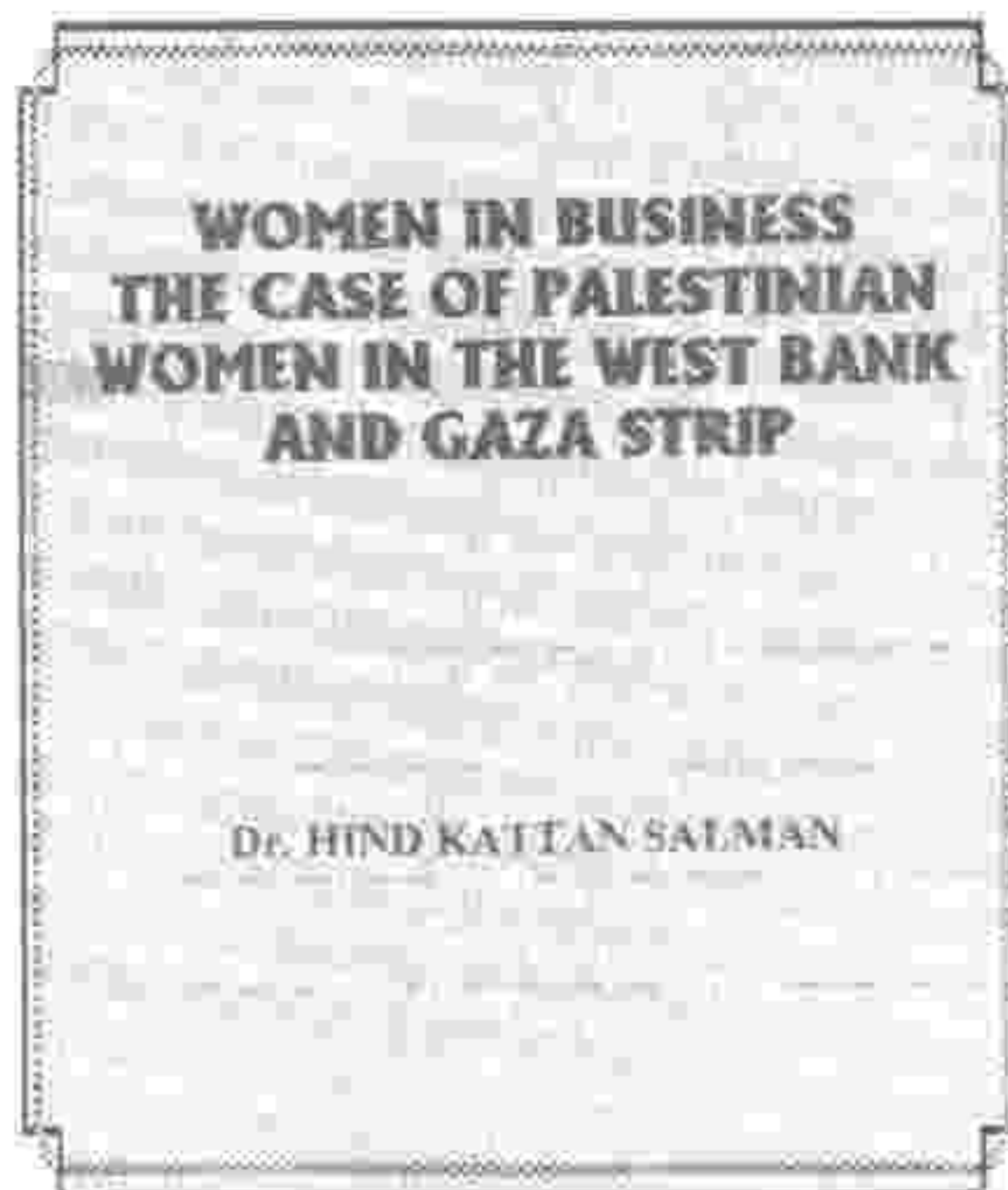


BRAIN STORMING GROUP

With the opening of the International Center of Bethlehem, the Center's employees as well as the volunteers from the United States and Germany considered it important to form a group to get together for fellowship and growth. Therefore, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and Vicar Beth Maeker from St. Paul, Minnesota began to organize meetings every other Friday evening to discuss different topics, hold Bible studies, or share the different talents of all those in the group. Occasionally, the group invites guests, such as the Center's Board of Trustees and special speakers, to take part in the evening meal. Known as the Brainstorming group, it has become a forum for Palestinians and non-Palestinians where they can listen to and learn from each other's points of view on varied issues. Among the issues discussed by the group in the last few sessions were Rabin's assassination and the procedures of the January Legislative Council elections. Two videos, one entitled "Bethlehem," and the other "An Occupation Set in Stone," were also watched and discussed. Other activities included Bible studies as well as sharing cooking and musical talents. Overall, the Brainstorming group evenings have become an important and enjoyable part of the Center's activities.



CENTER'S PUBLICATIONS



Women in Business: The Case of Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip
By Dr. Hind Kattan-Salman.
Emerzian Press

This book is the second publication of the Department for Women's Studies. It is a collection of studies conducted by Dr. Hind Kattan-Salman for various conferences held in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, between 1993 to 1995. The first study in the book, *Palestinian Women and Business Education*, documents the shift in the interest of Palestinian women in business education and subsequent careers in business. It also investigates the factors that led to such a shift. The second study, *Palestinian Women Entrepreneurs: A Pilot Study*, focuses on female-led business by examining current practices in establishing and managing these businesses and the factors which facilitate or constrain any future growth. The third and final study, *The Contribution of Palestinian Women to Business Development in the Aftermath of Peace*, discusses the main achievements that Palestinian women have realized since the Uprising as well as the problems and limitations which obstruct women from fully participating in the society's economic life. Dr. Hind Kattan-Salman is a professor in the business faculty at Bethlehem University, the West Bank. She is an active member of the women's group here at the International Center of Bethlehem.



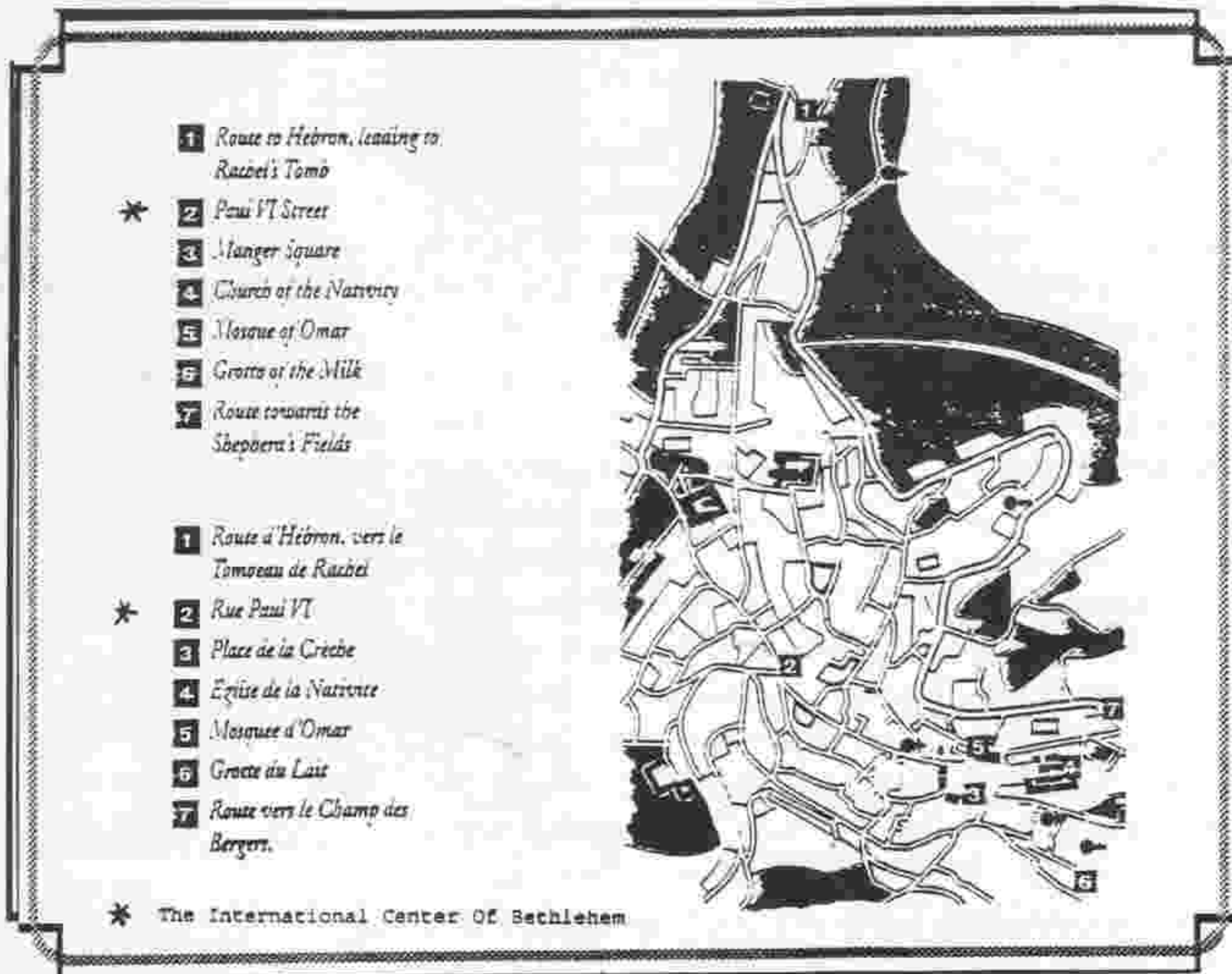
I am a Palestinian Christian
By Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb.
Fortress Press

"Raheb wishes Western Christians to understand the Palestinian Christians' reality, of which they have been deeply ignorant and whom they have injured and betrayed in that ignorance. He also grapples with how Palestinians Christians can develop a local theology that can be both truthful and helpful in mediating the conflicts between Israel and Palestine and among Christianity, Judaism, and Islam."

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NEWSLETTER

No. 3 (August 1996)

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Center's Activities From April-August, 1996

LECTURES

- * April 11, 1996. Dr. Ruth Weaver, "Irony in the Gospel of Mark."
- * April 18, 1996. Dr. Munir Fasheh, "Towards an Intellectual Uprising."
- * May 9, 1996. Dr. Hind Kattan-Salman, "The Participation of the Palestinian Woman in Private Enterprise."
- * May 13, 1996. Mr. Lance Laird, "Islamic-Christian Relations."
- * June 5, 1996. Dr. As'ad Ghanem, "A Critical Analysis of the 1996 Israeli Elections and their Results."
- * June 6, 1996. Mr. William Beelaerts, "The Dutch-Palestinian Relations and the Role of the Dutch Government in Supporting Sustainable Development in the Peace Process."
- * June 20, 1996. Mr. Sulaiman Abu Dayyeh, "Secularism: Between Reality and Imagination."
- * July 12, 1996. Francis Khoury, R.N., "Women Health Issues in the '90s: Maintenance and Prevention."

CULTURAL EVENTS

- * March 30, 1996. Concert by the Abdinghof choir of the church of Paderborn.
- * April 3, 1996. Film, "The Blue Angel."
- * May 23, 1996. Film, "Through the Veil of Exile." Director David Benchitrit.
- * May 29, 1996. Film, "Jerusalem: an occupation set in stone?"
- * June 13, 1996. Film, "Shawshank Redemption."

SUMMER MUSIC EVENINGS

The Center has sponsored a number of musical evenings that were widely received and attended by locals as well as visitors staying at the Abu Gubran guest house. Performing at these musical evenings was Mr. William Canavati, who is a Bethlehemite pianist and singer.

REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

The International Center's reintegration program, which aims at stopping immigration of young Palestinian academicians and motivating graduates of foreign universities to return to Palestine, has sponsored a number of cultural activities in the past few months. These activities are designed to help recent returnees to reintegrate socially and culturally. Among these activities were the *Arabic Evening* on July 28, a *social gathering* at the Everest resort on August 11, and a *sight seeing tour* on August 18 to the city of Nablus, the ruins of the ancient city of Sabastia, and the Samaritan community.

GERMAN LANGUAGE COURSES

Since October 1995 the International Center has been offering German language courses. A new language course will be offered starting September 1996.

LECTURES TO FOREIGN GROUPS

Since opening its doors, The International Center of Bethlehem has been active in giving lectures to visiting foreign groups. The lectures vary in the topics they cover and aim to create an active dialogue between Palestine and the West. Among the issues addressed are the actual political situation in Palestine, Palestinian Christians, the role of Palestinian women, and the activities of the Center. Since October 1, 1996, the Center has received 148 German-speaking groups and 32 English-speaking groups.

ABU GUBRAN GUEST HOUSE

The Center's guest house accommodates groups and individual travelers who are looking for a place to stay for periods of time that ranges from an overnight to a number of weeks. Since October 1, 1995, a total of 26 groups and 15 individuals stayed at the guest house, where they enjoyed its comfort, Palestinian atmosphere, and home-cooked meals that are especially prepared for them.

ALTERNATIVE GUIDEBOOK OF BETHLEHEM

The program of Alternative Tourism finished in April 1996 an alternative guidebook of Bethlehem. This guidebook deals with the history of the city and gives an impression of the culture and life of Bethlehem's inhabitants. This book is the first guide book on Bethlehem that is written by people from Bethlehem. Besides, it is the only one available on the market, since the rest are out of print.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE

In addition to the international youth exchange training, several youth groups have visited the International Center in the last few months.

CONFERENCES

LAKISA

As part of the on-going effort to build bridges of understanding between the young people of Germany and Palestine, as well as to create youth-leadership, the LAKISA conference was held in Stuttgart and Blaubeuren/Germany in May 19-31, 1996. Among the issues discussed at the conference were the following: prejudice and ethnocentrism, methods of youth encounter work, group-dynamics, as well as program planning and formation. Through attending this conference, the participants were prepared for future international youth exchanges.

Tri-lateral exchange conference between Germany, France, and Palestine

The first trilateral German/French/Palestinian youth exchange program took place in Hamburg/Germany and Paris/France from June 2 to June 15, 1996. The participants learned how to work with different nationalities and how to arrange programs for trilateral youth exchange.

The Youth Conference in Prague

This conference took place in Prague/The Czech Republic from July 20 to July 30, 1996. The purpose of this conference, which is the third of its kind, was the strengthening of relations between the youth of Bethlehem and the youth of the city of Naumburg/Germany. The first conference, which took place three years ago in Naumburg/Germany, was followed by another one in Bethlehem, where the German youth stayed at the Abu Gubran guest house. This year the two youth groups decided to meet in the Czech Republic. The program of the Prague conference included lectures about the situation of Palestinians in light of the peace process, meetings and discussions, and sightseeing trips.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Dar al-Kalima

As part of the *Bethlehem 2000* project, the International Center of Bethlehem has been charged with developing the concept and overseeing the establishing of a Christian theological Academy in Bethlehem. The Academy, which aims at reviving the theological tradition in Palestine, will be opened by Christmas of 1999. This institution will serve as a link between the North and the South and will contain the following four departments: Department of Theology, Department of Euro-Asian Studies, Department of Peace Studies, and Department of Contextual Art.

Women Politicians

The International Center of Bethlehem and the Goethe Institute in Jerusalem are sponsoring a seminar in March 1997 on women's political participation in Palestine and Germany. This seminar, which will be attended by 20-25 active Palestinian and German women politicians, will give these women a forum for the exchange of experiences and help them to network. The subjects that will be discussed at the seminar include: political biographies/entrance into politics, positive discrimination laws, women and elections (nomination process, quota,...), women in NGOs/universities, as well as strategies for future planning.

Business Women Conference

A conference entitled "Women Economic Empowerment in Palestine," with a focus on women and enterprise development, is set to take place in November, 1996. This conference will focus on three major areas. a) Building the capacity of women entrepreneurs by developing models

for increasing women's access to and control over economic assets and managerial skills to enable them to make a living

on a sustainable basis. b) Advocating for gender-sensitive enterprises. c) Programs and new approaches relating to women's micro-enterprise development in Palestine.

Cologne Partnership

Since the cooperation treaty between Bethlehem and the city of Cologne/Germany was signed on March 12, 1996, the International Center of Bethlehem has been active in developing exchange projects between the two cities. So far, the following has been agreed on. First, arranging two photo exhibits, one in Cologne about Bethlehem and the other in Bethlehem about Cologne. Second, the City of Cologne will introduce the city of Bethlehem at its travel-market fair. Finally, the two sides will promote youth exchange, including bringing a school theater group, that will be performing in Tel Aviv, to give a performance in Bethlehem.

The Frankfurt Book Fair

The Frankfurt Book Fair (Die Ausstellungs- und Messe-GmbH des Borsenvereins des Deutschen Buchhandels) is organizing a moving book fair in the areas under the Palestinian Authority at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Book Fair of 1997. The International Center will host the book fair from April 22 to April 29, 1997. Among the activities that will take place here as part of this fair are an afternoon for children, a cultural lecture, and a workshop for Palestinian publishers.