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Volume 1, Issue 2

October 2006

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What we're up to...

Leading the way together – in conjunction with 'Save the Children'

Following the successful summer camp in Beit Jala near Bethlehem, Mendors from each of the nine non-violence centres across the West Bank and in Gaza, are now in the final stages of producing a newsletter, a film and a radio programme about this camp.

Towards A Culture of Tolerance and Coexistence

A major project, under the auspices of the **European Commission**, is focused on developing a curriculum of tolerance and democracy for teenage schoolchildren. This has been based on a year of research into values and has been tested with pilot groups of teachers and children.

Smarter Without Violence. We also have a project with the Radley Trust of Britain, producing publicity materials for active nonviolence, with the slogan, "Smarter Without Violence".

We are seeking funding for strategic planning, the continuation and expansion of our radio soap opera (**Dar Dar Abuna**), for the nonviolence centres and activities, including town meetings, debates and media work, and a variety of other projects.

MEND in Transition

By Adel Ruished, Board Member, MEND Palestine

When MEND was first established 8 years ago, the vision was to promote nonviolence and democracy via workshops and training courses delivered to targeted groups (i.e. school teachers and students, women's organizations etc.), who were already interested in and shared the main goals of MEND.

After several years of working with these groups, the necessity to promote nonviolence and democracy within the society as a whole has risen due to the political situation. This affects all aspects of Palestinian daily life, starting from the occupation and its procedures against the civilians and ending with the simplest issues for families.

For this reason MEND has decided to work with all sectors of Palestinian society, and has created groups of people around the West Bank to implement its nonviolence goals. It wasn't easy at the beginning to speak with people about nonviolence and democracy. It was a kind of national crime to speak about such expressions and ideas. We described this process as part of the normalization process with the occupation and a way to accept the situation as it is on the ground.

MEND received criticism and a number of threats against the groups and offices that had started forming in these cities. It was also hard to convince people that the message "Nonviolence and Democracy" is not a surrendering to the occupation or force. It was difficult for them to believe that in tense situations they should think about the other options available for dealing with the situation. We began to receive invitations and offers to work with us from different sectors, regions, and political activists in the Palestinian community. They asked us to implement our vision, activities, approach and principles in their places and cities, and to create a group or open an office in their neighborhood to affect the people and the community in general.

Through this MEND discovered that a lot needed to be done in order to start changing the way people think and to help them deal with issues which surround them, and to raise their awareness about nonviolence, so that they could confidently use this approach as a tool for dealing with problems in daily life, as a smarter way to face any tense situation. We took into consideration all relationships in society (i.e. politics, families, schools, work, and society) in order to help the people we work with to consider the 'glass half full' and to encourage them to believe that a better way of life is possible.



Palestinian National Dance

By Ahmed Masoud, AlZaytouna London Dabke Group

www.londondabke.com



DABKE is the national dance of Palestine and is often seen in festivals, celebrations and weddings. Originally, the inhabitants of the Levant used to live in houses built from stones with roofs made out of wood, straw and dirt. Each time, before it rained, the roof was supposed to be compacted, and this used to be done with a rolling stone, or *mahdaleh*. But before the *mahdaleh*, they use to compact it with their feet which required many strong men stomping the dirt hard in a uniform way that would compact it evenly. This event of cooperation is called *ta'awon* and from here comes the word *awneh*, meaning "help." This developed into the song *Ala Dalouna*, or roughly translated "Let's go and help." Therefore, the dabke and the rhythmic songs go together in an attempt to keep the work fun and useful. Eventually, musicians would play for them so that the roof was stamped down in a homogeneous way, sealing all the cracks and compacting the dirt, making the water flow down the roof without going inside the house. (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dabke> for more info).

Since the British occupation in Palestine in 1917, Dabke became a representation of Palestinian identity and was associated with political and national aspirations after the disaster of 1948 when the state of Israel was declared and hundred of thousands of Palestinians were deported from their land. Since then Dabke became the national dance of Palestinians and was emphasized more in refugee camps both in Gaza and the West Bank and in the Diaspora.

Dabke flourished in the 1970s in Palestine especially after the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) when the cultural movement in Palestine started taking its shape. As many writers and thinkers believed, reviving dabke as a form of a national dance of Palestine would help emphasize Palestinian identity by creating a homogenous Palestinian culture. Dabke Groups like El-Funoun and El-Aashiqeen were the first to realize the importance of dabke in the building of Palestine's national culture. Nowadays, dabke certainly occupies the centre of any Palestinian cultural representation.

Roving Reporter

15 year old Dana Abdel Fattah interviews 16 year old Fida Shade, a Mender from Tul Kerim

Q: What first attracted you to MEND?

A: I was very much interested when I first heard about Mend as it deals with various important aspects, including aiming to improve the personality, raise awareness and encourage youths to eliminate the opportunities of using violence in all areas of their lives.

Q: How Long have you been a member of MEND? What have you done with MEND?

A: I have been attending Mend for two years and during this time have received courses and tutoring through interesting methods. My training has involved domestic violence, child labor, communication skills and conflict resolution.

Q: Has being involved with MEND helped you?

A: These courses have helped me tremendously throughout my life and changed my attitude towards life. I have become capable of resolving my problems without violence. They taught me how to communicate with others and drew my attention to the serious social problems that my society faces such as child abuse and domestic violence. Mend has also given me the opportunity to participate in Drama and perform many sketches. Via drama I succeeded to express my points of views. Drama has also expanded my horizons and taught me commitment and confidence. I believe that Mend has allowed a new flow of experience to improve my personality as it was enriched by new social skills, confidence independence and self awareness about the environment surrounding me. Moreover, my relationships with the other menders conducted to nurture and empower my personality. This change was noticed by my friends and family who are very proud of me.

Q: Would you recommend MEND to other children?

A: Yes, I believe that mend is very important especially under these circumstances where occupation has a damaging effect on the children and I hope that Mend will have branches all over the world to give the children the great opportunity I had.

The spirit of Mend

By Ziyaad Lunat

Volunteering for Mend last summer proved to be a challenging experience. I visited many of the Mend nonviolence centers across the West Bank and traveled through checkpoints and the many road blocks that appear at random, and at any given time, on roads linking Palestinian villages. Some of the children have never left their towns, even though they have close relatives living not far away. This is because travel restrictions make it almost impossible for them to do so. The isolation of these kids emphasized even more the importance of Mend's work. For me, Mend is about building bridges between Palestinian youth.

Palestinian children are suffering immensely from the traumas brought by the conflict. Their view of the world is based on their daily experiences with the soldiers; the curfews and incursions. There is little awareness of the wider world and of the possibilities it could bring to them. Mend, through the innovative use of media tools and new technologies, encourages them to think in new ways working towards a future with tolerance and mutual understanding.

Unfortunately cuts in aid to the Palestinians due to the international boycott meant that some of Mend activities were in jeopardy. Many centers were in risk of being closed down and there was great uncertainty about the continuity of crucial support for some communities. I nevertheless saw determination and resilience in ensuring Mend's work does not stop as they were vital for so many children. In Nablus for instance, a vibrant group of volunteers kept the centers active, and the children had just finished a school play that toured the city. It is in this spirit that so many people have benefited from Mend and I hope I can continue to be part of this promising project.