

# The Work of the Weltfriedensdienst in the Global South

The triad “Peace – Development – Human rights” characterizes the program of the WFD. Civil peace work in Palestine takes care of the very youngest. Through the use of music and theatre, children and young people are able to reflect on frustrating experiences of powerlessness in a creative way. In a seemingly hopeless situation, this can pave the way for a peaceful future. Farmers in Senegal are encouraged to cultivate ecologically and sustainably; smallholders in Argentina are supported in the enforcement of their land rights.

The Weltfriedensdienst has partners in 19 countries in the Global South. The projects pick up local initiatives and support them both materially and by providing qualified personnel. This close cooperation with local partner organizations facilitates a fruitful exchange of expertise and experience between the North and the South. This is one of the fundamental goals of the Weltfriedensdienst. In order to review the achievement of its goals, the projects of the WFD are regularly evaluated by external experts.

Economic growth and the absence of war are no cause for complacency, as long as human rights are still being disregarded – for instance the right of Guinean girls to retain their physical integrity or the right to grow old with dignity. The Weltfriedensdienst is committed to the protection of people and their rights in the South as well as in the North.

## Children and Youth Theatre in Palestine

### An example of practical peace building.

In 1997, in Hebron, three young Palestinian actors began to use drama as a form of expression for the current social contradictions and tensions they were living with. Muhammed Titi, Raed Shyoukhi and Ihab Zahdeh were involved in many projects and activities in the youth theatre in the Hebron District. In more than ten years they have developed, rehearsed and performed a considerable number of theatre pieces. 2007 witnessed the establishment of the YES-Theatre as an officially

registered, non-commercial, non-governmental organization. Thus the basis of an ambitious target was set. By using theatre as a form of expression, the personnel intends to actively engage in the debate within Palestinian society. Through innovations in societal discourse hope has a chance to develop.

### The situation in Hebron, Palestine

In 1997 Hebron was divided into two zones: approximately 130,000 Palesti-

nians still live in district H1 under Palestinian administration. In H2, which also comprises the Old City, 40,000 Palestinians are living under Israeli military administration. 1,200 soldiers of the Israeli occupation forces are stationed in Hebron to protect the 500 Israeli settlers who live there. As a result, many Palestinians have left the Old City and moved to the surrounding neighborhoods under Palestinian administration. The Old City is now only accessible through Israeli checkpoints. Humilia-



## The YES-Theatre Project

**Type of project:** Civil Peace Service Project: Theatre education with the YES-Theatre

**Local partner:** YES-Theatre, Hebron

**Period:** June 2009 – June 2012

**Mediated Personnel:** two civil peace workers (drama educator, project coordinator)

**Financed by** the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

ting checks on locals and visitors keep most of the residents at a distance from the Old City. The historical Old City of Hebron, once the economic center of the region, stands largely empty. Young people in particular are frequently exposed to violent attacks from soldiers or settlers, due to the situation described above. Raids and arrests made by the Israeli military take place on a daily basis. Several hundred young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are currently being detained in Israeli prisons. Tremendous external pressures have led to the division of Palestinian society into several political fractions and there is a growing mistrust between them. As a consequence, domestic violence has increased and conflicts between different groups have escalated. Since the tensions are tremendous, there are hardly any international NGOs or cultural organizations operating in Hebron. The YES-Theatre offers Hebron, the largest region in the West Bank, one of the few opportunities for cultural and artistic activities.

## The Project

In 2008 the YES-Theatre and the Weltfriedensdienst developed the project, "YES4Youth". It makes theatre accessible for young people between the ages of 19 and 24: There, they experience working in a team environment, learn to deal with conflicts in a constructive way and take on responsibilities. As an initial step, until 2012 young people will be trained in workshops to become actors and multipliers. The participants apply their newly-acquired skills in local culture houses, working with children and young people. In the following period, a core group will be trained as professional actors, who will be able to make a valuable contribution to the expansion and renewal of cultural life in Hebron.

The Weltfriedensdienst has maintained close ties with Palestine since 1968 and currently supports grass roots initiatives there, including a women's cooperative and a nursery school between Kufer Na'me and Bil'in.

**Wa'ad Jamal Al Badawi: 13 years old, an actor of the YES-Theatre, Hebron:**  
*"Why I love theatre? Because it allows me to express my feelings and say what is going on inside me. Theatre also has the ability to improve the things in our community. Some plays speak of the problems we have in our community and they help children to find solutions and develop self-confidence. Theatre can also address good things that people don't talk about otherwise. Theatre is fun and something completely different from television. I wish there were more theatres in our camp."*

## Why would I like to perform our play in the Children's Culture Caravan?

*"I would like others to know something about how we live as children in a refugee camp. Theatre is a peaceful way to express our demands and ideas. I'm quite excited that through our play people from other countries will learn something about our situation, culture and our claim for freedom and justice."*

## How is life for me as a child in a refugee camp, compared to other children around the world?

*"I don't really know, this is the only place I have ever lived in. I was born here and have always been here. I only see other children and the rest of the world on television. That's why I am so happy that I have been given the opportunity to travel and to see how children in other countries play, to see whether we have the same games and whether their theatre is different to ours."*

