



Rebuilding Gaza Music School

لنعيد بناء مدرسة غزة للموسيقى





The Gaza Music School (GMS)

was established in response to growing demand for music education voiced by children and parents who attend the Qattan Center for the Child (QCC) in Gaza City, one

of the A. M. Qattan Foundation's main projects.

With each musical activity held at the QCC, whether a performance or a workshop, children were demanding more, including training to play musical instruments. So the GMS was launched as a 3-year pilot project against tremendous odds in July 2008, with co-funding from the Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and with pedagogical support from the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem. Space was rented at the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) building in Tel Al-Hawwa neighborhood of Gaza. It was refurbished and fitted out, staff hired and instruments and other resources procured.

Classes at the GMS commenced on 5 October, offering the first structured musical teaching programme ever in Gaza. Training classes in oud, violin, piano, guitar and qanoun were held bi-weekly, with one weekly theoretical session involving all 31 students. On 23 December, four days before the invasion, the GMS held its first public performance. Several bands, individual musicians and singers performed for over 500 people who filled the PRCS Hall to the brim. The atmosphere was euphoric. Parents, students and guests joined in the singing and some even jumped on stage to do the dabkeh (a Palestinian folkloric dance). Just after 11am on 27 December 2008, all

hell broke loose. The Preventative Security Apparatus building, located across the street from the GMS, was hit during the first wave of Israeli bombardment. The PRCS building and all surrounding buildings - mainly residential - were damaged. Windows and doors were blown out, walls crumbled, and some instruments disintegrated. Ibrahim Annajjar, the GMS Coordinator, was the only person present in the premises at the time. He was preparing to receive the children for that day's sessions, which were to start as usual at 3:30pm.

Fortunately, Ibrahim sustained only minor injuries. During a lull in the fighting a couple of days later, he managed to return to inspect the damage and to store the instruments that were in an acceptable condition in one of the bathrooms, which he assumed would be the safest spot in the building.

On 14 January, the Israeli Army entered Tel Al-Hawwa. Within 48 hours it looked as if an earthquake had hit the area. The PRCS building now took a direct hit, sustaining severe structural damage. Part of it just collapsed. The GMS was completely destroyed.

In comparison to the vast humanitarian needs now facing Gaza, this small cultural project must seem of secondary importance. The enormous cost of rebuilding homes and schools and the infrastructure, of helping the healthcare system back on its feet, of putting children back in school after weeks of disruption – is going to be very high.

Yet projects such as the GMS are a vital part of helping to protect Gazan society from collapse and particularly to ensure that children are able to recover from the brutal psychological and physical impact of the invasion.

None of the above will be practicable nor possible without the total lifting of the cynical blockade that Israel has imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than two years, an act of collective punishment that is unequivocally illegal under International Law. The blockade has meant that only the most meager essentials were allowed through. Construction materials, including cement and steel, were almost impossible to get in. The Strip's economy almost collapsed, unemployment rose dramatically and what was once a vibrant and dynamic part of Palestine, became totally dependent on "humanitarian aid".

To break that siege, as demanded numerous times by the UN, is the only possible way to lift Gaza out of its devastation and overcome its people's deep sense of isolation from the outside world.

It has been one of the A.M. Qattan Foundation's principle strategic objectives to support every possible opportunity to bring artists, writers, dramatists, circus clowns, dancers, musicians and filmmakers to Palestine to break the country's isolation. We have also created many opportunities for artistic exchange and sent a number of young artists to work or study overseas.

Why is this so important? Because it breaks the sense of isolation; it makes communities feel a little less vulnerable, especially when visited by international groups; it opens young people's eyes to other countries' cultures and life experiences; and it creates training opportunities and new skills previously unavailable in the country. And to our visitors, it shows them Palestine as a vibrant, creative, critical and dynamic place in spite of the hardships of the Israeli siege.

The Foundation has undertaken to rebuild the school and to re-launch its programme

as soon as possible. But your support will still be vital. Please consider what you as an artist or musician can do, especially to break the siege – a concert tour in Gaza perhaps, an invitation to a Palestinian group to perform or study in the UK, a benefit concert. If you are a music teacher, you could think of giving some of your time to supporting staff in the GMS, two of whose foreign members fled the fighting and are unlikely to return soon. If you are able to contribute instruments or notation, that too would be fantastic.

If you would like to support GMS, please write to Omar Al-Qattan on omar@uk.qattanfoundation.org or Ziad Khalaf on ziad@qattanfoundation.org. More information is also available on our website: www.qattanfoundation.org/en

Thank you very much for all your support.





A.M. Qattan Foundation

The A.M. Qattan Foundation was founded in 1994 in the UK and registered in Palestine in 1998. It focuses on two principal sectors, culture and education, which it considers as central to any long-term process of human development. It established the **Qattan Centre for Educational Research and Development** to contribute to the development of the quality of Palestine's school-based education system, and the **Qattan Centre for the Child in Gaza**, in order to nurture the curiosity of children, expand their knowledge and facilitate their access to other cultures.

The **Culture and Arts Programme** provides support to talented people, especially the young, in a number of creative fields. In 2004, the Foundation launched the **Palestinian Audio-visual Project**, which included a technical training programme and an extensive **School Film Education Programme**, which has created forty-seven ciné-clubs in Palestine's schools.

More recently, the Foundation initiated the **Gaza Music School Project**, the first of its kind in the Gaza Strip, to provide musical education and training to children.

Most of the Foundation's work is self-funded, although it also works with strategic partners such as the Ford Foundation, the European Union and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

www.qattanfoundation.org/en