

THE PALESTINIAN CIRCUS SCHOOL مدرسة سيرك فلسطين

YEAR REPORT 2008

Dearest friends of the Palestinian Circus School.
We proudly present you an overview of our activities in 2008.

2008 was a great year for the Palestinian Circus School. The circus school is growing and connecting more and more around the world. Having started in 2006 with many questions, we have become a school with many ideas and dreams for a bright future. We would like to start our overview with thanking everybody that contributed throughout the year to our work, in any way possible: donors, trainers and artists from abroad, festivals that invited us, organisations and individuals abroad that have kept supporting us in so many ways, people who lend us many attentive ears and gave us constructive feedback. To all and, THANK YOU for believing in us!!

At the same time, 2008 ended with another disaster in the violent history of our people and our country. The bombardments on Gaza that lasted for three weeks left more than 1200 dead, from whom 300 children, and over 5000 wounded. The traumas of the people are numerous and will take generations to be cured, if they will ever get the chance. It is hard within this context to keep the hope alive, to keep the spirits up. To keep working on a very small level for a better future, and believe in the small contribution we can make to our country. But we keep in mind that art is in itself resistance, since we refuse to give up. We will continue with the circus to give the children and youngsters in our society the right to dream, the right to play, the right to create, the right to speak out and reach out to the world.

A very big Thank You to all the donors and financial supporters for their contributions to all our activities in 2008:

- Broederlijk Delen - Belgium
- Kinderpostzegels - Holland
- Swiss Development Cooperation
- YWCA Sweden
- Clowns Without Borders Sweden
- Royal Danish Representative Office and the DCCD
- The Belgian Consulate General and the Belgian Technical Cooperation
- Presence Action Culturelles
- Masarat
- Al Watanya Mobile Company
- all individual supporters, circus initiatives and artists and all associations who kept fundraising some support for us.

In this year report you can find information about the following activities:

1. Weekly trainings of the circus in three locations: Ramallah, Hebron and Jenin
2. Student Presentations
3. Training of Trainers
4. Circus Behind the Wall presentations abroad
5. Circus Behind the Wall presentation in Palestine
6. Summer School 2008
7. Mobile Circus Tour 2008
8. Chair project
9. Clowns Without Borders Ireland visit
10. In memoriam
11. Some references of what appeared in the media about us in 2008

1. TRAININGS

In 2008 we have continued with training children and youngsters between 10 and 18 years old in Ramallah, Hebron and Jenin on a weekly basis.

Ramallah

We moved our training location from the Al Kassabah 4th floor to Ashtar Thetare for two months. Since July 2008, we found a training location in a storage room in Al Bireh.

In Ramallah in 2008 we have been training three groups on Wednesdays and Fridays:

1. 'beginners' group: 15 boys and girls
2. Advanced group: 10 boys and girls
3. YWCA group: 25 boys and girls

Hebron

In Hebron, in cooperation with Sharek Hebron, we continue to give trainings every Saturday in the Child Happiness Centre and our group is the same one of last year but has now moved to a more advanced level. We work with one group of 18 boys and girls between 12 and 16 years old.



Warming up in Hebron



Jenin

We continued training in Jenin every Thursday - in cooperation with Sharek Jenin:

1. A group of 8 boys until June 2008, From October 2008 the boys group reached a number of 16. aged between 12 and 17 years old.
2. A group of 40 girls until June 2008. From October 2008 we started with a new girls group of 20 girls aged between 16 and 19.

In 2009, we will continue working with the same groups and start with a new beginners group in Ramallah.



Photo by Veronique Vercheval



2. STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

On May 1, 2 and 3 we organised student presentations in the three locations.

The students of the three locations were mixed for the presentations. Around 10 students from Ramallah travelled with us to Jenin and gave a presentation together with the two groups of Jenin. The presentation took place in the Swetat Garden in Jenin in cooperation with our local partners Sharek and Relief International.



For the presentation in Ramallah, we had around 6 students from Hebron and 4 from Jenin who participated with all the kids from Ramallah in the show. The presentation was given in Ashtar Theatre in cooperation with Ashtar.

In Hebron again, 10 children from Ramallah and 4 students from Jenin gave a presentation together with all the students from Hebron in the theatre of the Child Happiness Center in relation with our local partner Sharek.



All the presentations knew a great success. Families, friends, neighbours, partners came to see the progress of our proud students. In Jenin we had around 400 people that came to see the presentation. In Hebron even around 500. In Ramallah we had around 100 people.

3. TRAINING OF TRAINERS

The Palestinian circus school started with a first workshop of three weeks in August 2006. 10 young Palestinians were introduced to circus by Palestinian, French, Italian and American circus artists. From these 10 youngsters, 2 became trainers, 1 is an advanced student studying circus now for a year in France, and 1 played with us for a long time in Circus Behind the Wall.

In the meantime, we have a team of 4 trainers, of which 2 are even full time staff with the circus since 2008. To build the future circus school, to improve the technical, creational and pedagogical skills of our trainers we invest a lot in advanced training opportunities for the trainers.

This year we had intensive trainings in Palestine with 2 trainers from Sweden (Swedish Clowns Without Borders) for 3 weeks and with 8 people from Denmark (Goglerskolen - Arhus) for three weeks (see under point 6: summer school). In 2009, we also had the visit of the Irish Clowns Without Borders. Next to giving us some training, they also performed their show for many kids in Ramallah, Hebron and Jenin.



Next to that we have had several volunteers that came to work with us for a few days. These trainings have helped us a lot in improving the skills of our trainers and some advanced students.

In 2008 we had the opportunity to send out one of our trainers, for an intensive training of six weeks abroad. The first three weeks took place in ESAC (Ecole Supérieure des Arts de Cirque Belgium). The next three weeks took place in CNAC (Centre Nationale des Arts de Cirque France).

At the same time, the CNAC offered a one year intensive training to one of our first students. This training is running from September 2008 until June 2009. She is being trained on basic circus skills and more profoundly on theatre, dance, acrobatics and tissue.

4. CIRCUS BEHND THE WALL ABROAD

April 2008 Belgium and France

In the framework of the launching of Asseoir l'Espoir (more about this project further in the newsletter) and of the MASARAT Palestinian Cultural Autumn in Belgium, we were invited to Belgium In February 2008. During our stay we performed the show Circus Behind the Wall on three occasions: in Tournai in La Fenêtre, in Antwerp in De Roma and in Brussels in the Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles, under a real circus Chapiteau!

At the same time we had received an invitation from the theatre Antoine Vitez in Ivry sur Seine in France (neighbourhood of Paris) to come and perform the show there on February 16 and 17. In Ivry, we also received several days of acrobatics training from a teacher at the CNAC.



Photo: Lucia Cristina Estrada Mota

In total with the 3 shows in Belgium and the 2 shows in France we reached an audience of 1700 people! We were very touched by the amount of response and the kind of response of the people after the show. People were very touched by the performance and many shared that it was really a very big surprise to see circus people from Palestine, something they could never have imagined.

For some students in the group it was their very first travel abroad and a very first performance in front of a foreign audience, tensions were high, emotions of happiness even more



Also we had an incredible media attention. When asking radio reporter why they all wanted to cover the story, he told us we had a bit the Barenboim impact: a story with a strong message about the injustice but with a hopeful spirit from the Middle East. People in Europe get lost and depressed with the news about the conflict. When young and beautiful Palestinians bring them a message in a different way, ears and hearts open up again.

It was also great to meet up again in Belgium and France with many of the all circus friends who were part of the first trainings in Palestine. Our friends from France, Norway, Italy, Belgium and the UK all came by and some even shared in the shows backstage. It was a wonderful moment of re-encounter,

Some links to announcements and media coverage of our trip:

<http://www.tournai.be/fr/officiel/index.php?page=595>

http://www.notele.be/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2080&Itemid=163

<http://www.radio1.be/programmas/och1/680031/>

<http://www.indymedia.be/en/node/25888>
<http://www.france-palestine.org/article7736.html>

<http://www.ivry94.fr/affiche/details/evenement/cirque-derriere-le-mur/?cHash=1892fe4ce3>

July 2008 France

In July again the Circus Behind the Wall team travelled to Europe to take part in an exchange project between our school, a youth group in France and the circus PARADA from Romania, a wonderful circus project with street children of Bucharest.
<http://www.kinderkulturkarawane.de/english/Parada/project.htm>

Next to a strong encounter with the people from Romania and France building new circus relations for the future, the team also performed the show Circus Behind the wall during the festival "La Grange a Dompaire" On July 12 and 13.



5. CIRCUS BEHIND THE WALL IN PALESTINE

July 2008 at the Ramallah Cultural Palace

Ramallah Municipality was celebrating its 100th birthday with a very large cultural festival. We were invited to perform during the Ramallah Municipality Centennial Celebration in the Ramallah Cultural Palace on July 27. It became a great success with more than 800 people showing up for the show.



The opening of the evening was outside with some of our students presenting their latest trics.



6. SUMMER SCHOOL 2008

The Palestinian Circus School in cooperation with the Danish Goglerskolen (Arhus) developed a full training program for two weeks for the trainers and 10 of the advanced students of the Palestinian Circus School. During two intensive weeks in July - August, the Danish trainers (who came with a team of 8 teachers and students from their school) were introduced in the reality of Palestine and in the power of its children and youth in the circus. The result of the two weeks of training was a beautiful and dynamic show with a lot of circus, but also some hip hop.



Training at the Episcopal Training Center



Training on the brand new aerial structure

The whole program was financed by the Royal Danish Representative Office and the DCCD, with the support of the MIP program of the Belgian Technical Cooperation, that offered us to buy a real sound system and aerial structure to tour around with and to train in the different locations.

7. MOBILE CIRCUS 2008



As a result of the intensive workshop with the Danish Goglerskolen, a production of 11 Palestinian trainers and students together with 7 Danish trainers and students travelled around the country for 10 days.

The 10 presentations had place in the following cities: Majd Al Shams - Occupied Golan, Qalqilya, Jenin Tulkarem, Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem, Sebastia and Ramallah
 In total more than 6000 people assisted in the shows

The Circus on the Road - to the Golan here..



Backstage .. like the big ones..



The crowd in Tulkarem



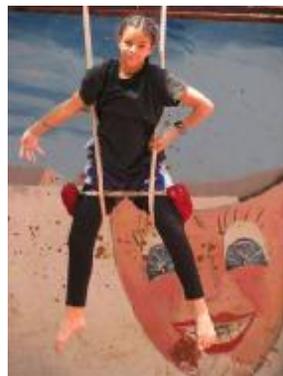
and in Jenin



Performing....



With the support of Al Watanya Mobile Company



Sabastiya August 2008

The 16 of August our Danish guest left us. But we kept moving onwards with the show. The whole idea was to make a show which could continue independently. On August 24, at the Sabastiya Festival for Tourism and Cultural Heritage, we proudly presented the pure Palestinian version of the Mobile Circus 2008.

Ramallah November 2008

Due to the passing away of the great Palestinian Poet Mahmoud Darwish, may he Rest in Peace, we cancelled our Ramallah presentation in August 2008. In stead we made the presentation at the Ahlia College in November 2008.



8. CHAIR PROJECT FOR THE CIRCUS



The circus school started as a dream and adventure. But one with many risks. One of them being the possibility to finance all the activities and needed logistics for the project. Since a beginning dream can not really count on the support of donors because of a lack of 'credibility' and institutional security, we had to find other sources. The Belgian Anita Huybens and her family and friends became such a source. As a very socially engaged artist she one day woke up with the idea of having people all around converting a wasted or broken chair - that everybody somewhere has in the house - into art objects, and sell them to support the Palestinian Circus School.

An idea became a project involving hundreds of people in a social artistic program with a goal. In March 2007, a first big artistic chair sale took place in Leuven, the home city of one of the co-founders of the circus school. A small site and later a blog was created: <http://stoelenvoorcircusschool.blogspot.com/>

The project inspired others and PAC (Presence Action Culturelles) launched the project Asseoir l'Espoir in 2008. <http://www.asseoirlespoir.be/>



Asseoir l'espoir means 'Seat down the Hope ' The project ran throughout 2008 in the French part of Belgium and involved artists, schools, academies, a university and many others in making chairs. These chairs were exposed in several expo-sales.



The expo sale in Mons

All the support of the chair project will be put aside to support a future permanent infrastructure for the circus school. More to follow in 2009.

A BOOK AND A DOCUMENTARY

To prepare the Action of Asseoir l'Espoir, we received a mission of PAC in Palestine end 2007, together with a team of notele (the journalist Dominique Rombaut and cameraman Romain Basso Basset) - a Belgian regional tv station and the photographer Veronique Vercheval. The team travelled with the circus for 10 days and eternalised their meeting with the new born circus in a lot of footage and touching stils. In March 2008, the documentary "Un cirque en Terre Ceinte / A circus in the Holy / Encircled Land" saw the light.

The documentary was shown for the first time in Palestine at the French Cultural Centre in the presence of Leila Shaid, the Palestinian delegate to Belgium and the European Commission, the Governor of Ramallah and a representation of the Belgian General Consulate in Jerusalem.



In January 2008, during our stay in Belgium, we met Aurelia Dejond, a young Belgian journalist.



She got intrigued by the circus team and interviewed each and every person of the Circus Behind the Wall team. Pac people tried to convince her to travel to Palestine and come and meet us in our 'natural environment'. She decided to follow us and in March 2008 we received Aurelia a week in Palestine. It would be her very fist trip to the Middle East. The result of her stay land her impressions, together with the pictures of Veronique Vercheval resulted in the illustrated diary:



9. IN MEMORIAM

In May 2008, we passed a very sad moment at the circus. Safwat Al Salami, 12 years old, one of the circus students in Hebron since March 2007, left us. Safwat became the innocent victim of a family feud in Hebron. His family had nothing to do with the dispute among the two families. Safwat was at the wrong time at the wrong place. When arms entered the conflict Safwat was with his father on the street.

When they heard the guns they headed home, but Safwat never made it home. He was shot in the head and died a few moments later. His mother later told us how he had just been practising on the unicycle before leaving the house, the thing he loved the most in the circus. It has been a very hard time for the trainers and the colleges of Safwat at the circus.

We will always remember him and be with him. May he rest in Peace.



Anita, you are with us in everything we do, in all you have done, in all our students lies a little bit of the dream you wanted for this world.

We will remember and love you always.



The chair project initiators in Belgium and Holland

In September 2008, we had to say goodbye to one of the Belgian aunts of the circus and the initiator of the Chair project. Anita Huybens, aunt of one of the founders of the circus, passed away after years of struggle against cancer. Anita gave her last soul to the circus. As a very socially moved artist Anita became famous in Belgium through her poppies project, in which she made fields of 2000 ceramic poppies to fight against landmines in Africa. When the circus school started in Palestine, her hands started to itch. And she came with the idea for the chair project and mobilised hundreds of people to turn ordinary, many times wasted, chairs into art objects. Anybody who would meet Anita wouldn't be able to resist her belief, her strength, her laughter and her incredible energy to make out of every day one that matters. And they'd all get infected with the chair virus.

Anita had a last dream before leaving us, after her very emotional visit to Palestine last May 2008. To have kites fly over the wall. To have kites as symbol of freedom being made everywhere and let them fly to regain the freedom and to support our circus school. Slowly the first kites are meeting the sky in Belgium.

10. MEDIA REFERENCES

We give you the link to some media articles in 2008 related to our activities. These links are in English, French and Dutch.

A Mobile Circus to challenge immobility
<http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article609>

Circus Against Apartheid
<http://www.skin-online.com/PDF.aspx?itemid=8>

Circus School komt op bezoek
<http://www.standaard.be/Artikel/Detail.aspx?artikelId=j51nknk>

Wij zijn doodgewone mensen
<http://www.standaard.be/Artikel/Detail.aspx?artikelId=ls1nkea>

De Ramallah a Chalons: deux Palestiniens racontent
<http://www.lunion.presse.fr/index.php/cms/13/article/236192/>

Le cirque comme réponse a la répression
http://www.notele.be/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1282&Itemid=31