

THE PALESTINIAN CIRCUS SCHOOL
مدرسة سيرك فلسطين

YEAR REPORT 2009



THE PALESTINIAN CIRCUS SCHOOL

Dearest friends of the Palestinian Circus School,

2009 in Palestine started where 2008 sadly ended. The Gaza horror is still on our mind. The beginning of the year was another black page in our Palestinian history. At the end of 2009, justice for the Palestinian and especially for the Gaza people has not come any closer. Slowly the eye of the world has turned to other 'burning' matters.

As Palestinian Circus School, we stubbornly continue to offer the opportunity to children and youth to express them selves through circus, to pass a message of change and hope in Palestine and abroad. We insist in offering them opportunities that the occupation and imprisonment deprive them from and to demand the right to exist as strong, creative, innovative, healthy and happy people, investing positive energy in their society.

We have moved again this year to a new temporary location. From now you can come and find us in the building of the ETVTC - Episcopal Technological Vocational Training Centre - in Al Tirah - Ramallah. Ahlan Wasahlan!

Again a big Thank You to all the donors and supporters for their contributions to all our activities in 2009:

- [Broederlijk Delen - Belgium](#)
- [Kinderpostzegels - Holland](#)
- [SIDA - Sweden](#)
- [Presence Action Culturelles - Belgium](#)
- [Al Qattan Foundation](#)
- [Watanya Mobile Company](#)
- All individual supporters, volunteers, interns, circus initiatives and artists and all associations who kept fundraising for us and/or who came to the oPT to work with us on a voluntary basis!

In this year report you can find information about:

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You can find more about the school on our website: www.palcircus.ps

You still don't receive any information about us and want to subscribe for our newsletter: please send a message to: Palestinian.circus@gmail.com

1. WEEKLY CIRCUS CLUBS

In 2009, we continued training children and youngsters between 10 and 23 years old in Ramallah, Hebron and Jenin on a weekly basis. The school counted 90 students in 2009, taught by 3 trainers.

For the first semester 2009, the circus school was still running 5 circus clubs;

- 1 in Hebron with 14 students
- 2 clubs in Jenin: 10 boys and 40 girls from the Jenin girls social rehabilitation centre
- 2 clubs in Ramallah: 15 students in the beginners group and 11 students in the advanced group.

Hebron

In Hebron we continued training a group of 14 students, 10 boys and 4 girls between 10 and 16 years old, on a weekly basis at the Child Happiness Centre in cooperation with the centre and Sharek Hebron.



Preparing the open day in Hebron

Ramallah

From January till May 2009, we continued training at the premises in Al Bireh. In September 2009, the school moved to its new location in Al-Tireh (ETVTC) where we now train in a real adapted sports hall.



Due to the shortage of suitable locations and equipments needed to continue challenging our students from Jenin & Hebron and after having shared in the 2009 summer school, the PCS decided to bring the 3 clubs together in one advanced group, counting 27 students, training all together every Friday for 4 and a half hours. Next to working with them on a more advanced technical circus level, the trainer's team developed a strategy to also teach the students some pedagogical issues in order to become trainers' assistants. This, in the future, will help in spreading circus in Palestine, where the school will have a bigger pool of trainers and trainers' assistants to teach circus in different cities and locations.

In addition to that, the school continues training a new beginners group every Friday afternoon for 2 hours, with a total of 15 students.

Jenin

As a part of the PCS's social goals, the school is still teaching circus games and techniques at the girls' Social Rehabilitation Centre in Jenin, as a part of their curriculum.

From January till May 2009, we worked with 17 girls. The classes ended with a small presentation of basic juggling skills they learnt during their graduation day in front of their families, friends, teachers and the Ministry of Social Affairs. They were all impressed by the techniques they learnt and how circus could benefit the girls in increasing their confidence and self esteem.

In September 2009, the circus school started working with 40 new girls in the centre, all very motivated to learn circus. They already performed a small presentation in Nablus, during a celebration of the fight against AIDS organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The presentation was seen by most as one of the most unique contributions to the event. The school will continue to work with the 40 girls until the end of May 2010, where they again will perform a small presentation during the open day.



Open days

Every year in May, at the end of 1 year circus club, we organise an open day in each location during which the students make small presentations for family, friends and neighbours. This way we increase their performing skills, learning how to build a presentation for public, being on a 'stage', and working together for one aim, to make a good show and entertain their public.

At the same time, the open day is a moment in which we let our students teach their skills to their families and friends. This way we create a rather unfamiliar scene, but a great challenge, to have the child for one time teach their parents.



2. CIRCUS BEHIND THE WALL PRESENTATIONS ABROAD

In March 2009, we headed for the second time with a team of trainers and students to **Belgium** for a series of performances in the framework of the [Asseoir l'Espoir operation](#) of PAC and to participate at the two yearly renowned international circus festival: [La Piste aux Espoirs](#).



Circus behind the Wall was performed 5 times in Belgium, reaching an audience of 1600 persons.



Photo by Veronique Vercheval



Photo by Veronique Vercheval

Our presence at the festival La Piste aux Espoirs, didn't pass in silence either. Our team of Circus Behind the Wall performed different acts of the show at the Amateurs Encounter organized by Momes Circus.

At the same time, we organized a meeting for all circus people interested in getting to know the adventure of starting up a real circus school in Palestine. We also organized a big press conference and screened the movie: "[Un Cirque en Terre Ceinte](#)", realized by Notele, for an audience of more than 100 people. (Through this link you can see the entire film!!) You have difficulties in accessing the link? Open the internet site:

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

At the same time we had the great opportunity to see a remarkable circus show that relates the life in Gaza: '[Court-Miracles' de la Compagnie Boustrophédon](#).

We were even more lucky to meet with the entire company and learn that they would come to Palestine in June, invited by the CCF (Centres Culturelles Français) to present the show. The team was eager to set up some cooperation with the PCS and in June 2009, we had the honour to receive them for some days in our circus school to train our trainers and students.

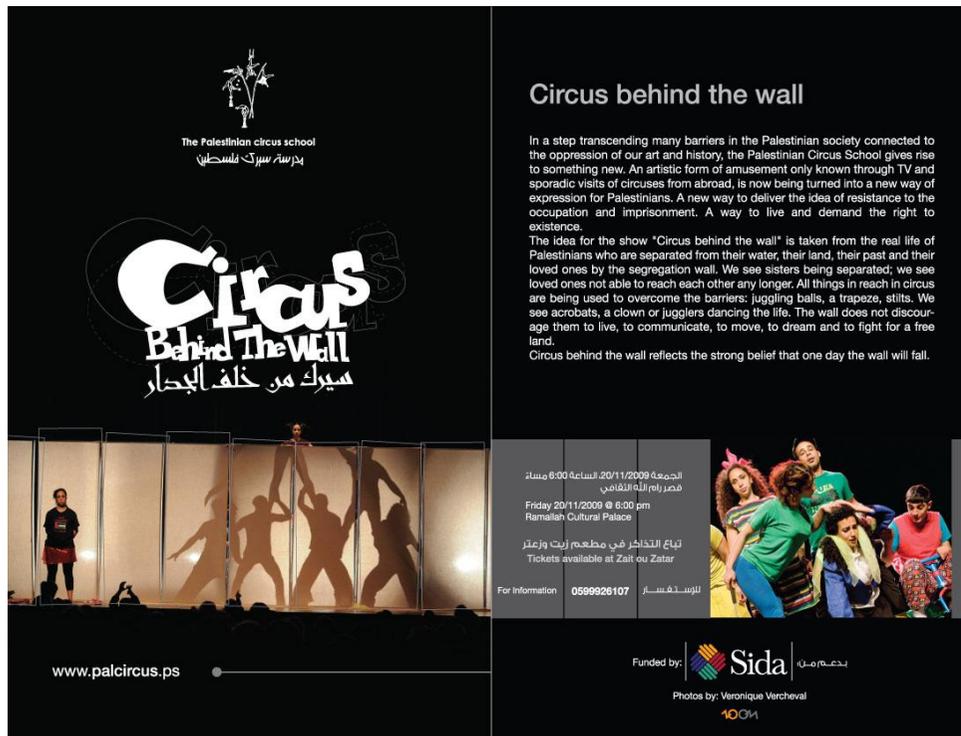
Circus Behind the Wall was also presented in July in **Bremen, Germany**, during the circus festival: Bridges for Youth for an audience of 250 people.

3. CIRCUS BEHIND THE WALL PRESENTATIONS IN PALESTINE

This year we performed the show twice in Palestine.

On July 17, we performed the show at the **Freedom Theatre in Jenin**, in the framework of their first Theatre Festival for children and youth. It was a great success. The average 200 kids and youth of the refugee camp went collectively out of their heads.

Our second performance was in **Ramallah at the Cultural Palace**, before a sold out theatre, reaching 800 people. The entire show in Ramallah was registered by the Palestinian National TV and has been broadcasted already on two occasions, reaching other thousands of people.



Circus behind the wall

In a step transcending many barriers in the Palestinian society connected to the oppression of our art and history, the Palestinian Circus School gives rise to something new. An artistic form of amusement only known through TV and sporadic visits of circuses from abroad, is now being turned into a new way of expression for Palestinians. A new way to deliver the idea of resistance to the occupation and imprisonment. A way to live and demand the right to existence.

The idea for the show "Circus behind the wall" is taken from the real life of Palestinians who are separated from their water, their land, their past and their loved ones by the segregation wall. We see sisters being separated; we see loved ones not able to reach each other any longer. All things in reach in circus are being used to overcome the barriers: juggling balls, a trapeze, stilts. We see acrobats, a clown or jugglers dancing the life. The wall does not discourage them to live, to communicate, to move, to dream and to fight for a free land. Circus behind the wall reflects the strong belief that one day the wall will fall.

الجمعة 20/11/2009 الساعة 6:00 مساءً
قصر رام الله الثقافي
Friday 20/11/2009 @ 6:00 pm
Ramallah Cultural Palace

تباع التذاكر في مطعم زيت وزاتر
Tickets available at Zait ou Zatar

For Information 0599926107 للإستفسار

Funded by:  Sida 
Photos by: Veronique Vercheval 

www.palcircus.ps

4. LET'S BUILD A CIRCUS SCHOOL IN PALESTINE

LET'S BUILD A CIRCUS SCHOOL IN PALESTINE

In the second week of April 2009 a group of architecture students and their professors from the Belgian **La Cambre School** (*Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels*) came to the West Bank to attend a weeklong joint workshop with the architecture students of **Birzeit University**.

Their aim: to develop several concepts for a future venue for the Palestinian Circus School.

Cooperation between the PCS and La Cambre began in October 2008, during the **Masarat Season** - and within the framework of *Asseoir L'Espoir* (see above).

While PAC was fundraising in order to purchase a plot of land for a future Circus School to be built, La Cambre School and the Architecture Department of Birzeit University started working together to develop several concepts for a facility to host the activities of the Palestinian Circus School.



A first meeting @ La Cambre with the Belgian students March 2009

During the joint workshop in Palestine from **8 to 17 of April**, the circus team had the chance to examine the plans of existing circus schools and discuss them with the students of architecture. Different forms, surfaces and spatial organisations of the relevant sections were suggested and discussed with us.



The concept retained and even suggested for funding to the Belgian Government, was the concept of the rehabilitation by [RIWAQ](#) of an old site in the village of Bir Zeit. At the end of 2009, we were still waiting for the official answer of the Belgian Government in relation to the funding of this site. To be followed!!

5. LEBOTRIO IN PALESTINE

From April 1 to 8, 2009, just back from Belgium, a Belgian circus team arrived to Palestine for a week full of circus.

[Lebotrio](#), three young men from Belgium and France, came to Palestine to perform their show 'Rhythm and Beast' and to train our trainers and students. A first small performance was given for the opening of the Al Manara Theatre Days Festival of [Al Kasaba](#)

After that they presented the show for a group of students of the Ahlia College in Ramallah, at the Child Happiness Centre in Hebron for about 500 very enthusiast kids, and in the Armenian Quarter of the old city of Jerusalem.



Photos by Khaled Jarrar

6. PALLASOS EN REBELDIA IN PALESTINE

[Pallasos en Rebeldia](#) or 'Clowns in Rebellion' from Spain came to Palestine in April 2009.

It was a brief encounter, a few days of working together, but a deeply moving moment for them and for us.

Ivan Prado, one of the founders of the organization came to offer some workshops of laughter therapy to our students and trainers. We didn't just laugh a lot all together, we felt that our students after that one day had become different, our relation with them was different, and we kept talking days and days about the experience. For the Palestinian Circus School, respect from the society is a capital issue to guarantee the benefits of our work. We therefore have to be reserved with the females, and look serious to be taken serious. And then came a person convinced that madness alone can save the world. So he broke all our imposed reservations, and just made everybody feel great by laughing for hours. And they all loved it, as if they released accumulated tensions of years. We knew that we had a lot to learn still.

They made a documentary 'Mashi: Trasi que Trasi' about their experience and are screening it in Spain and abroad to raise awareness about Palestine and to collect the necessary funds to organize the Festiclown Palestine 2010. The trailer can be seen on [youtube](#).

Being convinced we wanted to continue working with and learning from the Pallasos en Rebeldia we decided to accept the proposal of the rebellious clowns to organize the yearly festiclown festival in 2010 in Palestine. [Click here for the presentation of Festiclown Palestine 2010](#).

7. SUMMER SCHOOL

The summer of 2009 was a unique one for the Palestinian Circus School. We decided to enlarge our scope, and involve more students in the Summer School trainings, giving the opportunity to 18 of the most committed and advanced students of the weekly circus clubs in the three locations (Ramallah, Jenin & Hebron) to participate. The summer school took place between the 20th of July and the 6th of August. During this period, strong bridges were built between the students of the three locations.

Where the last years we depended largely on foreign circus people for the trainings, this year the PCS trainers Mays, Fadi, Nayef and Shadi got ready to take full responsibility for the intensive training in acrobatics, juggling, aerials, clowning and performing. We were also very happy to have the support of our own student Ashtar Mualem. Ashtar is the first Palestinian circus student that has just finished her first year of preparatory circus education at the professional circus school CNAC (Centre National des Arts du Cirque) in France, and who will pursue full circus studies there over the coming three years!!



Three foreign circus trainers came to reinforce the school's team. Emily, from the United Kingdom, a graduate student from the professional circus school CircusSpace in London. She is specialized in aerials (trapeze / double trapeze) and acrobatics. Caspar, from Sweden, a graduate student from the professional circus school ESAC (Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque) in Belgium. He's a great juggler, acrobat and clown. Edward is Colombian, who started his own circus group in Colombia with street children, and is now studying at the professional circus school CNAC in France. A first class performer.

8. MOBILE CIRCUS 2009

The team of 28 circus addicts (18 students, 4 local trainers, 3 international trainers, 2 administrators and 1 photographer) worked very hard to offer more than 6000 Palestinian children, youngsters and adults another great Mobile Circus show with the theme of 'Environment & Cleaning'. The show was performed in Nablus, Jericho, Jenin, Hebron, Bethlehem and Ramallah between August 8 and August 13.

And because all this was still not enough, on 10, 11, 12 and 13 August, a team of 9 Italian clowns from the "Associazione Veronica Sacchi" joined us for the shows!

During the Mobile Circus Tour, the school was reminded painfully of the occupation while passing the container checkpoint on their way to perform in Bethlehem. Some of the students were beaten and dealt with very roughly by the Israeli soldiers. Their only crime was sitting on the bus and listening to some music while a soldier was talking to them. It only made the team even more determined to perform its great dynamic show for all the Palestinian population.

Note: not long after the end of the summer school, one of our students was detained by the Israeli army. He was eventually released after paying a large sum of money, and after having gone through solitary confinement, long and harsh interrogations and sleep and food deprivation. Charges against him were that he had thrown stones to a soldier when he was 14 years old. They waited until he became 18 - a month before arresting him - so he could be dealt with as an adult. More about the case can be found under the last point, the PCS in the media





9. PCS IN BREMEN / GERMANY

Once again a team of the PCS traveled abroad for a workshop and to participate at the festival “[Bridges for Youth](#)” with a performance of “Circus Behind the Wall”.



Between June 25 and July 1 the Palestinian, German and French participants taught each other all they know in circus and prepared for the welcoming of all the other participants of the festival. From the 2nd to the 12th of July 2009 Bremen became the arena for the gathering of about 90 young people from six nations coming together to share their common passion: circus. Using the language of the body, laughter and amazement to overcome all borders and creates points of contact where there are often too many barriers in the people's minds.

The Palestinian team did not just represent the school and their circus acts, but represented all Palestine, by developing a huge workshop for all the participants. During the workshop they played a simulation game to make people understand the history and the current reality of Palestine.



10. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE STAFF

Capacity building on the pedagogical, technical and artistic level of the team members is becoming every year more important. In our process toward the main goal of developing a professional educational and social circus program, the constant research and development of the team has become a major challenge. That's why we keep offering our trainers and students intensive workshops in Palestine and abroad.

This year the main learning opportunities for the team were:

- Learning new circus techniques during a 3 week workshop annex festival in Bremen / Germany (see above)

- during the summer school in Palestine thanks to presence of the three foreign circus professionals (see above)
- During a three week intensive pedagogical workshop given by two circus professionals and ex- students of the [Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles](#), the main pedagogical circus training program in Europe.
- During a three week intensive technical artistic stage for one of the trainers with the Goglerskolen in Denmark
- During the visits to Palestine of several circus artists and companies that gave a lot of their time to train our team as LEBOTRIO, with Kenzo of [Carre Curieux](#) and Le Boustrophédon.

During a study visit of the General Director to France in October, a concrete cooperation agreement was discussed with the director of the French National Circus School: Le Centre National des Arts de Cirque - [CNAC](#) and with the president of the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools - [FEDEC](#), to embark on a long term capacity building program for the trainers of the PCS. From 2010 onwards the first professional circus workshops with these schools will be organized.

11. THE PALESTINIAN CIRCUS SCHOOL IN THE MEDIA

English

Palestine Monitor: Meeting Mohamad from the Palestinian Circus School
<http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article1080>

Palestine Monitor: A student of the PCS placed under arrest by the Israeli Military
<http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article1074>

Photo shoot: Mobile Circus 2009
<http://www.photoshelter.com/c/wmarijnissen/gallery/Palestinian-circus-school-Mobile-tour-2009/G0000BAjzM2ocN1g/>

Video: SEENSOON: Mobile Circus 2009
http://seensoon.net/index.php?option=com_seyret&Itemid=0&catid=2%E3%80%88%3Den&lang=en

Video: AIC: My way to free my country
http://alternativenews.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2148:jerusalem-diaries-episode-28-the-palestinian-circus-school&catid=152:jerusalem-diaries&Itemid=899

Pulitzer Center: A night at the Circus
<http://untoldstories.pulitzercenter.org/2009/12/juggling-the-occupation-a-night-at-the-circus.html>

French

Video : L'Ecole de Cirque a Charleroi
<http://www.fulltv.be/L-Ecole-de-cirque-de-Palestine-a>

http://www.pac-charleroi.be/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=53

Arabic

فرقة مدرسة سيرك فلسطين تقدم عرضا في مجمع "اسعاد الطفولة"
<http://www.maannews.net/arb/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=218473>

الطريق الى القدس.. مسيرة فنية وسط رام الله بمشاركة عشرات الفنانين
<http://www.alquds2009.org/atemplate.php?id=1783>

عرض "سيرك من خلف الجدار" في قصر رام الله الثقافي غدا الجمعة
<http://www.alquds.com/node/214127>

! رابكلا رهبيو راغصلا كحضي .. "رادجلا فلخ نم كريس"
<http://www.al-ayyam.ps/znews/site/template/article.aspx?did=127132&date=11/22/2009>

"سيرك من خلف الجدار" يدخل البهجة إلى قلوب أطفال فلسطين
<http://www.alghad.com/index.php?news=465548>

Dutch

Palestijns Circusgeweld
<http://www.radio1.be/programmas/stor/1558703/>

Stoelen en meer voor circus school
<http://stoelenvoorcircusschool.blogspot.com/>