

Delivering Warmth and Solidarity: MECA's Annual Winter Relief Campaign

On December 27, 2022 Dr. Mona El-Farra, MECA's Director of Gaza Projects wrote from Gaza:

Thunderstorms, strong wind, and heavy rain in different parts of the small enclave. Thousands of people are living in fragile, tin-roofed homes that started to leak in the early hours of the morning. Mattresses, blankets, and clothes are heavily soaked with water. The basic infrastructure is not good enough to cope with such an emergency—with no basic water drainage, no electricity or sewage pumping. A similar crisis exists in Lebanon where millions of long-time Palestinian refugees struggle along thousands of newer refugees from the war in Syria. In these conditions MECA partner organizations, staff, and volunteers hurried to help.



From December 2022 through January 2023 MECA provided winter relief to more than four thousand children and families in Palestine and Lebanon.

Planting Trees and Nurturing Roots in Palestine

This year, MECA is working with partners in Palestine to plant 3,500 olive trees and 500 grape vines in dozens of villages throughout the West Bank during Palestinian planting season from January through March 2023. We are grateful to the 161 individuals and groups who already made contributions on Giving Tuesday and since then to plant trees in Palestine. To support this project please go to: www.mecaforpeace.org/trees

This update provided by MECA Palestine Projects & Social Media Coordinator Waed Abbas in East Jerusalem. Waed interviewed people at our Palestinian partner organization Stop the Wall Campaign. Israeli military and settler violence reached new and terrifying levels in 2022.

The impact was devastating and continues into the new year. The olive harvest, which begins in October, is usually a time for social gatherings, unity, and reconnecting with nature and land. It has now turned into the most violent season of the year, targeting Palestinians, as well as their lands and trees.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, approximately 7,000 olive trees were uprooted, poisoned, burnt, had chemicals sprayed on them, or were cut down. In addition, there were 200 physical attacks on the farmers themselves. The highest number of olive trees to have been uprooted was in Nablus with 1,600 trees destroyed.

The violent act of uprooting trees is a mirror of the violent act of uprooting people from their homes— whether by home demolitions, detentions of family members, or

Planting Trees, Continued on page 3

Seventy-five Years is a Long, Long, Long Time

By Executive Director Zeiad Abbas Shamrouch

This May 15, Palestinians mark 75 years since the beginning of what has become a continuous Nakba or catastrophe for the Palestinian people. When I was young, during the First Intifada in 1988, we never thought we would reach this time. Either we would be back in our homes and villages, or we would be dead.

Seventy-five years is a long, long, long time. I am 58 years old; I don't want my time to run out while I am still a refugee, waiting to access my right to return. That is the sad part. My mom's generation—the catastrophe survivor generation—they passed away but we still consider them refugees in their graves. My mom wanted to be buried in her village in the land beside her parents and grandparents.

What helps me continue to be hopeful is the continuous Palestinian struggle for our rights. Especially when I see what the new generation can do rooted in *sumoud* (steadfastness), despite what they are going through in their daily lives under Israeli occupation. It seems they can see the end of Israeli settler colonialism.

I often talk with my friend Jawad from Silwan. To be honest, we smoke and have coffee while we talk on the phone. Sometimes it's late at night his time and early morning for me, and sometimes the reverse.

"I am living and witnessing an incredible moment of history," he told me recently. "No one can ignore it unless they are ignorant. The Israeli colonial system is moving very fast and becoming more brutal day after day. They are killing and maiming more Palestinians every day; it no longer matters if they are children, or women, or old people. Their bulldozers are more rapidly destroying Palestinian houses, gardens, playgrounds, schools. They are rushing to expand settlements into every part of the West Bank. When you see settlers or soldiers walking down the street, they are always rushing."

"They have been like this since before 1948," I said.

"No, this is different. They are running from something after them. They are frantic to achieve their old plan to get rid of all the Palestinians because they are worried. They know that they have a problem with history; time is not on their side. Every day we witness atrocities: a child being killed; a house being destroyed. These are painful moments, but the people are hopeful because we can see freedom getting closer."

The same is true in the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli siege



is 16 years old. In Gaza there is a generation nearing adulthood that has spent their entire childhood in this open-air prison. Sometimes they forget this reality for a moment on the playground, playing music, or reading a book, but otherwise their

only window outside this prison is the internet. Despite what they are going through, this generation is proud and determined.

North of Palestine, our colleague Suha is working with Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon at MECA's partner organization Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organization. "For Palestinians in the refugee camps," she says, "from 1948 until the 1960s, they were in the survival phase. Then people were able to be more creative—about maintaining our culture, about building the resistance. But the current reality in the camps in Lebanon keeps pushing us back to the survival phase, to the struggle for food and water."

I know what Suha means. When I was a child in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, the focus for my parents and the rest of the catastrophe generation was to survive and help their children survive. As young refugees, we thought there were discrete stages to the struggle: survival, then creativity, then planning and struggle. But the reality now, after 75 years, is that Palestinians are often living all the phases at the same time.

Please join us for the Bay Area Nakba Commemoration (See back page)

In every town, every village, every refugee camp, the young people are fighting back. The new generation isn't interested in official statements from national or international organizations. They want an end to the Israeli occupation; they want to live in freedom. This is what keeps us as Palestinian refugees, often far from our homes, hopeful and able to continue our work.

As refugees, our eyes are always on the right to return. A few months ago, a friend from the U.S. was on her way to Palestine and asked me if I wanted anything. I said, "Go visit my village. Go visit Zakariya." When I was still in Palestine, I needed a special permit from Israel to visit the destroyed Palestinian villages of my family and friends. I went whenever I could to feel the history, to see what was left.

Jawad has "Jerusalem residency", so he can travel in a way that Palestinians in the rest of the West Bank or Gaza cannot. He and my friend from the U.S. planned a visit to Zakariya, taking along some young Palestinian artists. At 1 am San Francisco time, they facetedimed me. It was mid-morning

in Palestine. “We are at the entrance to the village,” they said. I felt excited and nervous. The last time I saw my village was in 2008 before I left Palestine to study in the U.S. How had things changed in the years since? Only three of the original buildings still exist: the mosque, the school, and one house where settlers now live. I told the group about the history of the village and guided them as they walked through it. Settlers gathered to stare at the cameras and pointed at some of the women who were wearing hijab.

Then the group wanted to see my family’s land outside the village. They hurried across the major street, and we were able to identify where our land used to be. My father’s family was among the poor in the village, so it wasn’t much land, but we had olive, pomegranate, apricot, and fig trees, and a vegetable plot. As the camera panned over the land, it became very emotional for all of us. By then the settlers were more threatening, and it was time to leave. For me this was a beautiful way to recharge my batteries, my spirit, my hope that we will return.

As we approach May 15, millions of refugees—from Palestine and many other countries—are living in terrible conditions. Many have died of thirst in the desert or sunk beneath the ocean as they escape oppression, poverty, and war. The world has no choice but to build our solidarity movements, stronger and more steadfast. And to continue the struggle for justice and liberation for everyone.

No doubt, we Palestinian refugees will access our right of return someday soon. It’s a fact, it’s not a dream. We know it, we feel it, we breathe it.

زينة
بدر



Several years ago, I visited my mother’s village Jarash with a friend. We are surrounded by the remains of the houses that were destroyed by the Israeli forces so that the residents would not be able to return home.



One of the few means available for Palestinians to make confiscation of their land more difficult is to ensure any possible stretch of land is cultivated and planted.

—Stop the Wall Campaign

the cold-blooded killings by Israeli soldiers or settlers. The roots of our olive trees are the roots of the people and their land. MECA’s “Plant a Tree” initiative conducted with our partners the Stop the Wall Coalition and Palestinian Farmers Union is beyond vital.

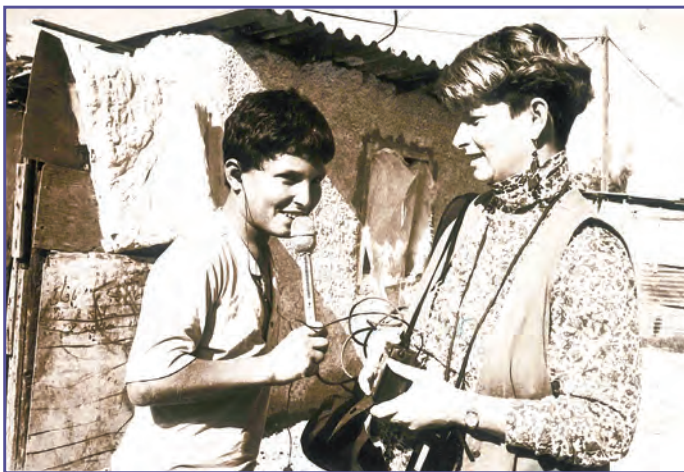
A representative from the Palestinian Farmer’s Union explained the importance of different groups coming together to plant trees, saying “The participation of farmers, youth groups, friends from various organizations and others increases belief in the justice of our cause and makes us feel that we are not working alone against the Israeli Occupation.”

MECA Says Goodbye to Penny Rosenwasser after 32 Years

Penny Rosenwasser, Middle East Children’s Alliance Events Coordinator extraordinaire—and so much more—is leaving her staff position after 32 years of amazing accomplishments. We will miss her a great deal, but we know that while she will no longer be on staff, she will always be a part of MECA and will continue her activism for justice in Palestine.

Penny began work at MECA in 1990, just two years after Barbara Lubin and Howard Levine started the organization, when events were the main source of funds. Penny produced more than 250 outstanding and popular events, for audiences ranging from 30 to 3,600 people, including renowned figures like **Noam Chomsky**, **Angela Davis**, and **Howard Zinn**, poets **Naomi Shihab Nye**, **June Jordan**, and **Alice Walker**; performing artists **Ani DiFranco**, **Pete Seeger**, **Richie Havens**, **Holly Near**, **Mos Def**, and **Melanie DeMore**. Writers and scholars like **Ali Abunimah**, **Naomi Klein**, **Ilan Pappé**, **Gore Vidal**, **Edward Said**, and **Dave Zirin**. Penny’s work brought Palestinian performers and speakers directly to Bay Area communities and beyond. She produced the Oakland performance of **Shorug’s Youth Debka Troupe’s** first US tour, and events with **Dr. Mona El-Farra**, **Dr. Mustafa Barghouti**, **Diana Buttu**, **Maya Abu Al-Hayyat**, **Haneen Zoabi**, among many, many others.

Penny’s work and commitment went far beyond event production. She led four MECA women’s delegations to Palestine; wrote her first book *Voices from a Promised Land: Palestinian & Israeli Peace Activists Speak Their Hearts* and did a nationwide book tour, benefitting MECA. Together with MECA founder Barbara Lubin, Penny organized rallies, marches, and vigils to protest Israeli occupation of Palestine, assaults on Lebanon, and sanctions and war on Iraq. They were arrested more than once sitting in at the Israeli Consulate and organized a major demonstration that stopped Benjamin Netanyahu from speaking in Berkeley.



Penny interviewing a young Palestinian on one of the four MECA women’s delegations she led in the 1990s.

4 MECA NEWS



Penny at 2022 Tribute to MECA founding Board President Gus Newport

“Talks for MECA have always been a high point of the year for me, and it’s hard to imagine MECA without Penny -- though I am sure it will carry on in her spirit. Working with her has truly been a pleasure. I wish her the best in whatever paths she follows, and surely illuminates, in the years to come.”

—Noam Chomsky



Valeria Chomsky and Noam Chomsky, with Penny getting ready for a 2009 MECA event.



Penny writes:

“I’ve been so honored to serve MECA’s critical mission since 1990, and I’m grateful for the ways I’ve grown, both personally and professionally, by contributing to MECA’s profound accomplishments. I leave with warm appreciation and thanks to all MECA staff for the hard work and care they give to MECA and the children and families we serve, every day. Immense thanks to all our supporters and volunteers, as well. Very special thanks to Barbara Lubin and Howard Levine, who had the passion to create MECA in 1988. Barbara taught me about Palestine, about going for a big vision, and about generosity and love.”

Thursday, November 9, 2006 - 7:30pm - Berkeley Community Theatre

The Middle East Children's Alliance, Speak Out, KPFA & Vanguard Public Foundation present:

VOICES OF A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

Special Reception to follow performance

Benefit for the Middle East Children's Alliance & Speak Out

Bay Area Premiere

Dramatic Readings Celebrating the Enduring Spirit of Dissent

Howard Zinn, Anthony Arrove, Aya de Leon, Melanie DeMore, Steve Earle, Nora el Samahy, Danny Glover (invited), Sandra Oh, Leslie Silva, Marisa Tomei, John Trudell, Alice Walker and more!

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE & Friends:

Poetry for Palestine!

Tuesday, September 22: 5pm PT/8pm ET

REGISTER NOW! \$10 donation, www.mecaforpeace.org/poetry

Benefit for Palestine & Lebanon



Backstage after Penny produced the “Voices of a People’s History of the United States” (l-r: Aya de Leon, Nora El-Samahy, Mos Def, Melanie DeMore, Howard Zinn, Penny Rosenwasser, Anthony Arrove, Barbara Lubin.)

TWO EVENTS THIS FALL from The Middle East Children's Alliance!

ALI ABUNIMAH DIRECTOR/AUTHOR **ELECTRONIC INTIFADA**

NOURA ERAKAT PALESTINIAN-AMERICAN ACTIVIST (SCHOOL)/ HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY

Tuesday, October 18, 2016 - 7PM

Thursday, November 17, 2016 - 7PM

MECA

A Benefit for the Children of Iraq

NAOMI KLEIN

“War & Fleece: How Economic Shock Therapy Backfired in Iraq”

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2005

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OAKLAND

COMING IN MARCH: ROBERT FISKI

www.mecaforpeace.org

BILL AYERS & BERNARDINE DOHRN

FUGITIVE DAYS

MEMOIRS OF AN ANTIWAR ACTIVIST

Bill Ayers

Sunday, February 22, in Berkeley

“a deeply moving elegy to all those young dreamers who tried to live decently in an indecent world” - Studs Terkel

change the world.

“I can only be a Muslim.”

Pete Seeger

Celebrate

the 30th Anniversary of the Middle East Children's Alliance – Plus a Tribute to co-founder Barbara Lubin!

MONDAY, JUNE 4, 5pm-9:30pm

Freight & Salvage Coffeehouse

2020 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

TICKETS: \$100 - \$1000

www.meca30.eventbrite.com, or www.mecaforpeace.org, 510-548-0542

5-7pm: Hors D'oeuvres & Wine Reception, catered by Zaytoon

7-9:30pm: Program with MC **ALI ABUNIMAH** and **ALICE WALKER**, **ANGELIA DAVIS**, **BARBARA LUBIN**, **MELANIE DEMORE**, & **HOLLY NEAR** with **TAMMY HALL**

and First Annual **Barbara Lubin Hell-Raiser Awards** to: **Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi**, **Reem Assil**, & **Lara Kiswani!**

A benefit for MECA's programs for children. We expect this event to sell out!

MECA 30th ANNIVERSARY

Book Release Celebration!

ARABIYYA: RECIPES FROM THE LIFE OF AN ARAB IN DIASPORA [A COOKBOOK] BY REEM ASSIL

Friday, July 8, 6-9 pm

Restore Oakland, 1419 34th Avenue, #203, Oakland

Music by DJ Emancipation

small bites by Reem's!

Register: www.mecaforpeace.org/Arabiyya

Tickets \$35 ; \$65, includes signed copy of book



Silwan Protest. Penny with Gemila, from MECA's women's peace delegation at a protest in Silwan, circa 1994.

Halaby Family Creates Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Women

Since 2005, the Middle East Children's Alliance has made it possible for more than a thousand Palestinian students to complete their undergraduate studies at Palestinian universities. This academic year, 150 Palestinians received MECA scholarships thanks to the generous support of individuals, families, and community groups. Please get in touch if you are interested in providing scholarships.

Dr. and Mrs. Raouf J. Halaby are pleased to announce the establishment of the Katrina and Beatrice Halaby Scholarship for Palestinian Women. Born in Palestine, Katrina and Beatrice moved in 1959 from Jerusalem, Palestine, to Beirut, Lebanon. In 1977 they moved to Redwood City, CA.

A graduate of the Beirut, Lebanon-based British Syrian College for Women, Katrina Halaby dedicated her life to teaching in pre-Nakba Palestine, first, at her alma mater, the Friends Girls High School, Ramallah, Palestine, then, in post 1948 Nakba, at the Palestinian village schools of Beit Safafa and Abu Gosh in Occupied Palestine. And for over fifteen years Katrina Halaby taught at the UNRWA Palestinian schools in the Burj El Barajneh, Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, whereupon she became the first female principal in the UNRWA school system. In 1947, Katrina Halaby was widowed at age 37. Among her many accomplishments, she raised and helped educate her five children, all of whom are college graduates; teaching generations of Palestinian children in Palestine and Lebanon; and adhering to the notion that education is the best passport Palestinians could possess, both under occupation and in diaspora.

After dropping out of college for several years to help educate her younger brothers, in 1973 Beatrice Rima Halaby was awarded a degree in Business Education from the Beirut College for Women. In 1986 and at the age of 49, Beatrice was awarded a Master's degree in Human Resources and Organizational Skills from the University of San Francisco.

This mother-daughter team were strong advocates for Human Rights and Women's Rights, especially the rights of the dispossessed Palestinians. They were also strong supporters of the many organizations that support the destitute victims of hatred and wars across the world. Until the last week of her life (November 29, 2021), Beatrice Halaby admonished her brother to support MECA, The Four Homes of Mercy, and Doctors without Borders "because they help the destitute, the sick, and the refugees as we were."

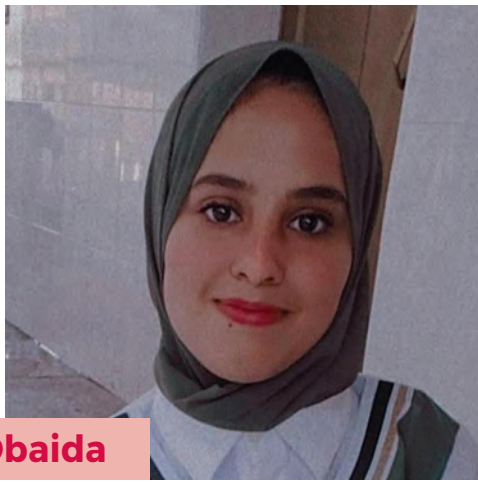


Katrina Halaby

This scholarship is a fulfilment of Raouf and Rachel's pledge to honor Beatrice's request to continue supporting MECA's educational mission. The scholarship is set up to provide higher education opportunities for Palestinian women (of all ages) from the Occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip.



Beatrice (Betty) Halaby



Shatha Abu Obaida

**Katrina and Beatrice Halaby Scholarship Recipient
Pharmacy Major, Al-Azhar university, Gaza**

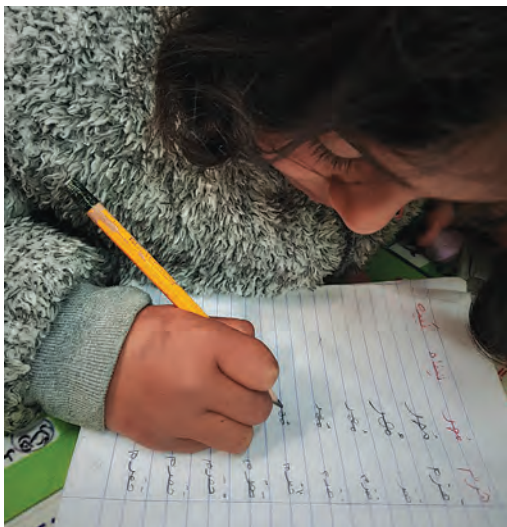
Shatha Abu Obaida’s family is originally from Beer Al-Saba’a, the large region renamed Beer Sheva after it was captured by Israeli forces in 1948 and the original Muslim and Christian residents were expelled to Gaza. Shatha now lives in a refugee camp in Khan Younis, Gaza. Growing up, she endured the death of her mother and a terrible gas accident in her home.

Shatha says:

“When I entered college and started studying the basic subjects such as cell biology and organic chemistry, I realized that pharmacy is more than wonderful, rich in useful and varied information, as it combines the science of chemistry and the science of medicine.

After graduating, I aspire to enroll in a master’s degree and then work as a pharmacist, maybe eventually opening my own pharmacy. I’m also interested in learning drug manufacturing processes and monitoring the therapeutic and medical specifications of medications.

I look to the future with confidence in the direction of my dreams. I will work to complete my studies with excellent grades.”



**Rural Women Providing
Educational and Emotional Support**



In November 2022 Israel demolished the newly built school in the village of Masafer Yatta, which had 22 students, ages six to eleven. The next nearest school is four kilometers away and is also at risk of demolition.

“We found that making sure we continue with our program—whether in the classrooms of the schools, or at our offices, or at our homes—we cannot stop showing up for these children, not only to support their education, but also to make sure they know we are in this together and we are here for them.”

—Fatma Nawaja, board chair of RWA

In 2015, eleven women from four scattered villages in the South Hebron Hills held a meeting, determined to develop the resources to achieve social, economic, and educational advancement for themselves, their children, and their communities.

Today, the Rural Women’s Association (RWA) organizes a range of activities—from summer camps to women’s income-generation projects to afterschool tutoring—in one of the most impoverished and besieged areas of Palestine’s West Bank. The Association carries out its crucial work in the midst of settler violence, demolitions of homes and schools, land confiscation, incarceration, and the lack of many basic services.

The dire conditions of Israeli Occupation in the South Hebron Hills, which include Masafer Yatta, have had a detrimental impact on children’s educational and psychological well-being. In response the Rural Women’s Association developed a project called Supportive Learning, which with support from MECA is working with children from first through sixth grades in each of six villages. Teachers spend several hours per week to provide academic tutoring, develop children’s study skills, build the students confidence, and give them opportunities to express their creativity.

You can make an online contribution to support the Rural Women’s Association at www.mecapeace.org/RWA

MIDDLE EAST
CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE
1101 8TH STREET
BERKELEY, CA 94710

MECA NEWS

SPRING 2023

NON PROFIT
ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
OAKLAND, CA
permit#8265



THE NAKBA

Join MECA to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba (Palestinian catastrophe). Please be sure to check www.mecaforpeace/events for details about a MECA event to recognize the massive expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine that began 75 years ago and continues every day. Special guest, date, time, and location coming soon.

More details soon at www.MECAforPeace.org.



Mark your calendars and dust off your bicycles for MECA's Second Annual

RIDE FOR PALESTINE, July 16, 2023.

Register now at www.RideforPalestine.com to start telling friends and raising funds to support MECA's projects for children in Palestine.