

Enrichment Learning Program for Children Aged 6-14 in Umm-Fakra, South Hebron Hills (Massafar Yatta), Occupied West Bank

THE VILLAGES GROUP, DECEMBER 2010

Goals:

- 1. To establish an educational framework for strengthening and enriching students in primary school to help them cope with learning difficulties and prevent dropout.**
- 2. To empower an Umm-Fakra resident who is university-graduate, by employing him to establish and implement the learning & enrichment classes.**
- 3. The overall goal here—as elsewhere in the South Hebron Mountain—is to empower the residents of Umm-Fakra and support them in their efforts to strengthen and empower their communities. The internal strength of these communities will enable them to withstand the many difficulties they face, and to continue living on their lands.**

Background:

The South Hebron Hills (Massafar Yatta) is a mountainous region located in the southern part of the West Bank. Many of its residents are cave dwellers, living in traditional villages. During the years of Israeli occupation, some of these cave villages were destroyed by the army, while others have been deserted by their inhabitants under pressure from Israeli settlers. Those still in existence were saved from eviction by the Israeli authorities through a cooperative effort of local residents and Israeli and international human right organizations.

The surviving villages are not recognized by the Israeli occupation authorities, which have disregarded international law requiring that an occupying force take responsibility for the welfare of residents living in occupied areas. The policy of non-recognition means that the villagers still residing in the area are denied basic services, such as water, electricity, and building permits. It should be noted that the Oslo Accords placed the South Hebron Mountain in Area C, that is, in the areas for which Israel has full responsibility.

Umm-Fakra (Fig. 1) is one of the villages that have survived in spite of the harsh conditions. To its south lies the Arad valley, and to the north – Tuwani, the only recognized Palestinian village in the region. On its eastern perimeter it is flanked by the settlement Ma'on and the violent outpost Chavat Ma'on, while the settlement Avigail sits on Umm-Fakra's lands to the west. The presence of these settlements severely curtails the access of Umm-Fakra's residents to the agricultural lands and grazing grounds they legally own, and which provide most of their livelihood.

Of the approximately 120 souls in Umm-Fakra, 30 are children ages 6 through 14 (1st through 8th grades). Today, they attend the primary school in Tuwani, a half-hour walk from their homes. Although Tuwani is a recognized village, the school operates only four hours a day, because Israel's occupation authorities governing the area do not provide support for the educational system, and the resources provided instead by the Palestinian Authority are minimal.



Figure 1: Cave village Umm-Fakra, general view

Rationale

Umm-Fakra's residents live under harsh conditions: mountainous topography, desert climate, limited sources of livelihood, constant threat of eviction by the occupation authorities, and a *de facto* creeping eviction by the neighboring settlements.

The harsh conditions, as well as the limited support from an undermined educational system for both struggling students and the most talented ones, are causing learning difficulties: some students fail to acquire the basic skills of reading, writing, and math,

while those who master the skills often fail to keep up with their studies at later stages. Many students end up dropping out to help their families out with livelihood and house chores.

Post-elementary education is even harder to obtain. The nearest high school is more than an hour's walk away, placing students at the mercy of hostile settlers. To reach the universities located in the towns of Yatta and Hebron students must use limited and expensive transportation.

Responsibility for the Program:

Responsibility for establishing and running the proposed program will be taken by Mr. Ali Hmamdeh (Fig. 2). Ali was born and raised in Umm-Fakra. With tenacity and resourcefulness, he has been able to overcome numerous difficulties and successfully graduate from the program in Arabic and Education at the Open University in Yatta (July 2009). He is the first Umm-Fakra resident to hold an academic degree. However, like many degree holding Palestinians, he remains unemployed - victim of a paralyzed occupation economy, and of the Palestinian Authority's failure to remedy the situation.

Ali has the ability and the desire to contribute to others. Umm-Fakra needs his services.

It was Ali who first proposed the idea for an enrichment program for students in his community. Moreover, the members of the Villages' Group, who have helped fund Ali's academic studies, support his proposal and are doing what they can to bring it to life.

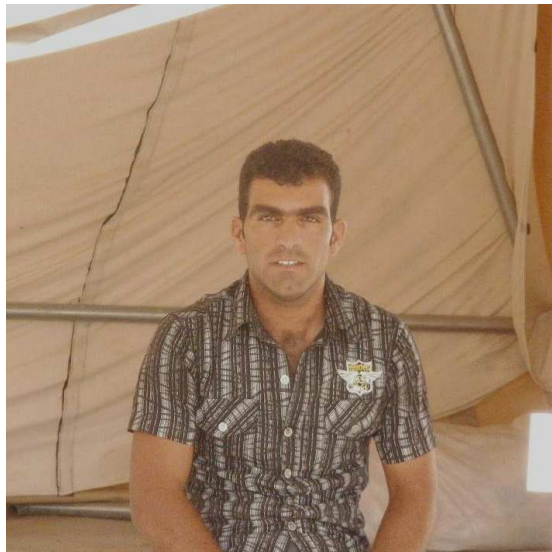


Figure 2: Ali Hmamdeh, initiator and designated head teacher of the proposed program.

Program details:

- Status: Pilot plan for one year (school year and summer vacation).
- Target population: Umm-Fakra children enrolled in elementary school, 1st through 8th grades (about 30 in all).
- Place: Existing tent, located over Ali Hmamdeh's family cave (Fig. 3).
- Program running times: Weekends (Thursday, Friday, Saturday), 16:00 to 19:00.
- Educational framework: Two age groups: 6-9 and 10-14; each group will meet for 1.5 hours on each of the three days.
- Areas of study:
 - Reading and writing skills;
 - Math for beginning grades;
 - Arabic, History, Geography, Quran and tradition.

Additional areas of study will require hiring a second teacher and are proposed for a later phase of the program, based on the success of the initial pilot. These would include: English, Sciences, Art.



Figure 3: Tent over the Hmamdeh's family cave, designated location for enrichment classes

Budget:

Teacher's salary: NIS 12,000 (calculated at NIS 1,000 per month for 12 months)

Furnishing: NIS 1,000 for desks and seats

Teaching materials: NIS 200 for blackboard;
NIS 500 for chalks, pens, pencils, notebooks, etc.

Reserve: NIS 1,000

Total: NIS 14,700 [~US \$4,000 or 3,000 Euro at December 2010 rates]

Note: estimated cost is for the first pilot year.

Contact

Erella Dunayevsky erelladun@gmail.com

Ehud Krinis ksehud@gmail.com