

Our Lady of Peace Center's First Conference

Participation and Interaction for More Encompassing Awareness

Press Release, Declaration, and Recommendations

In an atmosphere filled with faith and love, His Beatitude Fouad AL Twal, Patriarch of The Holy land, Palestine and Jordan, hosted the first conference organized by Our Lady of Peace Center on Friday 6/11/2009. This conference was in the noble attendance and participation of his Royal Highness Prince Raed Bin Zaid, head of The Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, Bishop Salim Sayegh, the Latin Patriarchate Vicar in Jordan and founder of Our Lady of Peace Center for people with special needs, the honorable Sheikh Professor Hamdi Murad, and Mr. Omar Hamza, the Ministry of Social Development's delegate.

First Session

The Masters of Ceremony, Mr. Rasmi Mahasna and Ms. Reezan Al Kurdi of the Amman Committee, welcomed the guests who represented a number of international humanitarian organizations that are partners with Our Lady of Peace Center, in addition to members of the Center's provincial committees. Bishop Salim Sayegh delivered a paper entitled, "Humanitarian Volunteer Work in Christianity", where he pointed out how volunteer charity work in Christianity is compulsory and that such work takes many forms: National, spiritual, and humanitarian. He stressed that philanthropy is what a person does for someone less fortunate in life. He backed up his claims with quotations from the Messiah: "freely ye have received, freely give"; and "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)" for every person in trouble wants others to rush to his assistance. So the understanding, mercy, and help that one wants others to offer him, he must show others. He also quoted, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15);" for feeling with others and sharing their happiness and sadness is also an act of mercy which people need in their individual, family, and social lives. He also mentioned that charity work doesn't know any religious divides, citing the story of the Jew and the Samaritan. He also mentioned in his speech what the Nuns of Love are doing in our beloved Jordan. These are the nuns of Mother Teresa who have dedicated their entire lives to serve those with special needs of every sex, ethnicity, and religion. He mentioned that Our Lady of Peace Center is doing free volunteer work to please God. Then he concluded his speech saying, "Volunteer work does not weaken the identity of a

person, and does not disguise itself for a religion or belief. It indeed reaffirms a person's humanity, dignity, and his faith in God the Creator, the Merciful, who loves all humans."

Professor Hamdi Murad, in a speech that centered around the Islamic thought on humanitarianism and volunteer work, said, "There is no point to the humanity of a person or to his faith if he is a true believer, unless he sacrifices for others." He added, "True faith is to love others and to love for others what we love for ourselves. Therefore, whoever wants to be loved by God must volunteer to help others in general, and those in need in particular." He pointed out elements in the Amman Message which confirms the importance of human rights, basic freedoms, dignity, and security. He explained how the message of Islam and its messenger encourage volunteer work. He pointed out that volunteer work is the embodiment of mercy towards others, especially those with special needs regardless of their degree of need. He stressed that we are invited on a heavenly mission to help the needy and do everything we can to promote this humanitarian work.

His Holiness Patriarch Fouad Al Twal started his address by talking about Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Jordan at the beginning of a religious pilgrimage that started out at Our Lady of Peace Center. He also quoted from the welcome speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II to the Holy Pontiff, ""We believe in one God who asks us to love our God, and our neighbor. All the holy books we revere preach this. Here and now, we must create a new all-encompassing dialogue, built on understanding and good intentions." His Holiness also reaffirmed that Our Lady of Peace Center founded by Bishop Salim Sayegh with his efforts and perseverance is an embodiment of the heavenly orders, for it contains love, faith, and humaneness. His Holiness also pointed towards the speech by His Majesty King Abdullah II where he stressed the importance of dialogue between the religions and respect amongst the faithful. He then drew the attention of the audience towards the good reputation that Our Lady of Peace Center enjoys all over the Kingdom, and the compassionate care it shows towards those with special needs. He then thanked Bishop Salim Sayegh who played the largest role in the success of Our Lady of Peace Center.

Omar Hamza, Assistant Secretary General of the Ministry of Social Development mentioned in his speech the advances made in Jordan in all aspects of care for persons with disabilities, and how such advances would not have been possible had it not been for the support and interest shown by His Majesty King Abdullah II. He discussed how we are beginning to witness the fruits of a high level of organization and coordination between all parties that are concerned with providing services to people with disabilities. The best examples of this are the training programs provided by Our Lady of Peace Center in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Development. These programs are the fruits of continuous efforts and the highest degree of co-ordination between the concerned parties in the field of the handicapped.

As for His Royal Highness Prince Raed Bin Zain, Chairman of The Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, he started out greeting the participants and expressing

admiration for their faith in the cause for which the conference had been convened. He mentioned that it is the human being who is the object, and it is the human being who is the subject of volunteering; for volunteering is reciprocal. He also stated that voluntary action makes an indispensable contribution to the development of society at large, especially when properly planned and guided. He added that volunteer work is not easy. Furthermore, he praised Our Lady of Peace Center and what it has achieved over the years embodying the concept of organized volunteer action that is based on creativity and generosity. Additionally, he noted that the success of the Center is not measured only by its diligence, but also by its accomplishments, the accomplishments that are evident to everyone around. His Highness added that the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities communicates continuously with Our Lady of Peace Center and supports all of its recommendations and decisions.

Second Session:

Engineer Majdi Dayyat, The President of the Central Committee for Our Lady of Peace Center in Jordan, started the second session which centered around the message of the center, its philosophy, accomplishments, and vision. He mentioned that the Center's goals are: to provide service to the persons with disability for free; to start a social dialogue that would affirm philanthropy at the level of the family and civil society institutions in favor of persons with disability; to provide assistance to such people; and to raise awareness about the rights of people with special needs. He mentioned that the handicap of any citizen should not prevent them from receiving their rights or from actively participating in regular life. He also explained the Center's humanitarian, spiritual, and national mission which is achieved through the services provided by the branches in Amman, Aqaba, and all the other cities throughout Jordan, and with the aid of the vigilant committees that are inspired to do volunteer work. He pointed out the Center's initiative to support the religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims on the basis of their common faith and in pursuit of strengthening national unity. He also directed attention towards the external units at Mafraq, Anjara in Ajloun (physical therapy), Fuheis (physical therapy), the early intervention center in Madaba, the units working in the desert (physical therapy) and the Aqaba unit (technology). He talked about the Center's approach of partnership and transparency emphasizing how this was aimed at increasing aptitude and building the abilities of individuals working in the organization and in other special needs organizations in the provinces by organizing workshops, seminars, and lectures. In his speech, he focused on the approach of self-evaluation or evaluation through specialists to improve methods and programs. Engineer Diat

announced that the visit of His Holiness the Pope to the Center and His Holiness affirmation of the Center's important role in the local community had boosted morale and had a large impact on the course of the Center.

Sister Adriana Biollo, the Centre Director in Amman, declared that the Center welcomes people with special needs, young and old, Muslim and the Christian, with no prejudice. This is done so that they people aged between 6 and 14 may be taught skills that would improve their lives. She also mentioned how the Center offers them assistance in all aspects of their lives so that they might lead normal lives and feel that there was no significant difference between them and others. She spoke about the night department which serves the age group of 14-23, where they learn different handwork skills. Concerning natural therapy, Sister Adriana mentioned that the Department accepts people as young as new borns and as old as they might be. She also pointed out the excellent relationship between the Center and the families of the learners and that periodical meetings for the families are conducted for the purpose of teaching them on how to deal with their children at home. Additionally, she listed some extracurricular activities that the Center organizes especially in the summer.

Dr. Nabeel Kharman, the Vice President and the Main Coordinator of the Committees presented the last paper which was about the seven committees of Our Lady of Peace Center that aim to raise family and community awareness about the handicapped and the need for accepting them in the community. He indicated the success of the committees in terms of excellent partnership with civilian and army organizations, in addition to numerous public and private institutions. Furthermore, he listed some of the activities that the committees carried out: the public marches, the free medical service days, the rehabilitation training courses for public institutions, and the rehabilitation programs for handicapped individuals and their families in Fuheis, Madaba, Amman, Mafraq, Zarqa, Aqaba, Karak, and Marj Al Hamam.

Then in celebration of the common faith that unites all Jordanians, the Muslim participants went to pray Jum'a, and the Christian participants headed to the Good Shepherd Church in a demonstration of coexistence and harmony rarely seen in any other country.

Third Session

In the third session, success stories of Our Lady of Peace Center were told:

Hamza is a child afflicted with Down's Syndrome. The Center worked with him in the Department of Severe Cases for 3 years, and he is currently in a regular kindergarten. His

father spoke of the challenges he faced from family and society, and talked about the improvements that his son made since joining the center.

Eyad suffered from autism. He too was dealt with by the Department of Severe Cases and showed considerable improvement in all aspects after joining the Center.

Qusay Samarna suffered from brain paralysis and Dystonia. He received therapy in the Natural and Occupational Therapy Departments. His mother spoke of her experience with other centers. She spoke about the effort exerted by the therapists at Our Lady of Peace Center which resulted in noticeable improvement for Qusay.

Following lunch in the Center's main hall, the final session took place. The agenda was discussed, and opinions were expressed about the recommendations to be made. Some of these recommendations were the result of the community's differing views towards the handicapped and the procedures that need to be taken with the handicapped. Some of the recommendations centered on the need for training, guidance, and conscious and responsible evaluation. Participants recommended that special education be made part of school curricula to raise awareness amongst the community towards the handicapped. They expressed the need for fostering volunteer activities at schools, colleges, and clubs on the International Day of Disabled People. They suggested the need for co-coordinating with school principals to promote volunteer work the same way that they promote physical education.

At the end of the conference, the secretary Raghda Zawayda, read the conference declaration and recommendations.

Conference Declaration

Under the patronage of His Holiness Patriarch Fouad Al Twal, the Latin Vicariate of the Holy Lands, in the attendance of His Highness Prince Raed Bin Zaid, Chairman of The Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, in participation of a number of international humanitarian partner organizations, and interested parties, as well as members of the provincial committees of Our Lady of Peace, and upon the invitation of the Central Committee, the first conference of Our Lady of Peace Center took place this Friday 6th of November 2009 under the title, "Participation and Interaction for More Encompassing Awareness".

After listening to keynote speeches in the opening ceremony, speeches that functioned as benchmarks for a plan of action in support of the work of the Center and its committees,

there were success stories of the Center that chilled our hearts. These successes were the result of co-operation between families and Our Lady of Peace Center. They reflected the extent of experience that the Center's staff possesses in dealing with different circumstances, and that reflect their real faith and patience, and that offer the best translation of the Center's vision, mission, and goals.

Having listened to all the papers and having participated in the discussions that ensued, we wish to express appreciation for the efforts made by the Central Committee, and the Conference Organizing Committee. Furthermore, we appreciate the interest and commitment of the individual members of the Center's committees. We have participated in the overall evaluation of the work done so far in the preparatory sessions for the purpose of improving performance; for if we do not know where we stand now we cannot plan where we would like to reach.

In light of our responsible evaluation, and in an attempt to push forward the wheel of positive advancement at serving people with disabilities, we stress the importance of activating the current laws, and of increase awareness of the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities and their families. This sprouts from the belief that the committees that make up Our Lady of Peace Center and which started work before the Center's opening are an effective and indispensable vehicle for working this special group of people. We call for respect of the human dignity and rights which religions came to uphold and promote, and that the constitution has firmly guaranteed. We, therefore, call upon you all to participate in implementing the decisions and recommendations that this Conference resolved to make.

Decisions:

Special appreciation is extended to:

- His Holiness Patriarch Fouad Al Twal, the Latin Patriarch of the Holy Lands for sponsoring this conference;
- His Highness Prince Raed Bin Zaid, Chairman of the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities;
- The Ministry of Social Development;
- The Noble Sheikh Professor Hamdi Murad;
- Our national media organizations;
- The Conference Organizing Committee.

Recommendations:

The Conference recommends

- That this forum be held periodically and on extended for more than one day.
- That benefit be made of the media services in spreading Our Lady of Peace Center's message, with a special focus on the types of disabilities that it deals with and the methods of treatment.
- That work continue for securing headquarters for the Center's committees so that they would continue their activities.
- That committees be formed in the provinces that do not have them, and that inactive committees be invigorated so that their services would reach people with disabilities who might be in dire need.
- That Article 30 of the bylaws be activated in order to expedite the selection of committee coordinators.
- That Article 6 of Section III of the bylaws be activated so that a consultative committee be formed.
- That a forum be established for the volunteers who work with people with disabilities from all over the Kingdom.
- That a periodical bulletin be published that would publish information about the Central Committee's programs and activities as well as the activities of the provincial committees, and publish news about laws and regulations that pertain to people with special needs.
- That varied programs be organized for the volunteers such that they would promote the creation of new leaders who might benefit from the new advances in communication and technology.
- That the base of volunteers be widened such that people from the 18-25 age group be recruited.
- That workshops and training programs for the youth would be organized in order to help them understand the concept of volunteer work.
- That expertise and contacts be exchanged between committees.
- That individual volunteers in a committee work directly with the children at Our Lady of Peace Center to gain firsthand experience in how to deal with people with special needs.
- That all relevant parties work to introduce legislations that would support and promote humanitarian work for the caring for persons with different disabilities.
- That school curricula familiarize students with the different handicaps and explain the importance of supporting them by institutions and civil society alike.
- That the number of courses aimed at raising awareness and educating the public be intensified and that such courses have sessions for dialogue between people with disability and their mainstream counterparts.

- That the Ministry of Social Development in co-ordination with Our Lady of Peace Center should delegate a number of specialists to work full time, considering the increasing number of people with disability who crowd the provincial departments of physical therapy.
- That the Central Committee and the Conference Secretariat follow up on these recommendations and submit them to His Holiness Patriarch Fouad Al Twal, to The Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, to the Ministry of Education, and to The Ministry of Higher Education.