



1for3 News

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IN MEMORY OF A FRIEND AND LEADER



The Lajee Center and 1for3 community has lost a leader and a dear friend. On April 14, 2021, Salah Ajarma, executive director of Lajee Center, passed away due to complications from cancer. Salah did not reach fifty years of age, but he lived many different lives. He was a fighter, a leader, a negotiator—and most recently he became a lawyer. He was a loving father, husband, son, and brother, a treasured grandson, and an incredible friend to have by one's side. He was one of the most determined people in a community of determined people. He believed fiercely in and worked tirelessly for liberation; he also worked for a better life

right now for children in his community. He secured for them dignity, excitement, travel, and a space for creativity and play at Lajee Center. He built a beautiful home for his family right in the heart of Aida Camp.

Salah was born and lived his entire life in Aida Refugee Camp, though his family came from the village of Ajjur. Less than 35 kilometers away, Ajjur is located in the foothills of the Hebron mountains and was, before its depopulation in 1948, a hub for other villages in the area because of its market, schools, mosques, and shrines. Salah grew large cactuses from Ajjur on his patio, nurturing his connection to his family's village.

In the beginning of the 2000s, he and others around him had grown disenchanted with the currents of Palestinian politics. They hoped to cultivate new ways of doing politics in the young generations. He was a co-founder of Lajee Center, established as a space where youth could dream of new futures together. He played an integral role in Lajee's move from two garages to its current location, where two floors accommodate its many programs. He worked hard to secure land for Lajee's garden, playground, and soccer field. He was determined to open this soccer field even though it had to be covered in netting to protect the Astroturf from the many tear gas canisters the Israeli army rained on the field. He led numerous Lajee delegations to Syria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Spain. The preschool—to be opened in September 2021 to serve children of Aida Camp—was a special dream of his, and he enjoyed seeing each part of this project come to fruition.

In the summer of 2014, Salah and other leaders of Lajee had to decide whether and how to run a summer camp even as Israel's ferocious war on Gaza raged. Day and night, protests against the war raged in Bethlehem and in

Aida Camp itself. It was unseemly even for children to have too much fun as everyone watched the bombs falling on building after building in Gaza, knowing that so many people were being killed and so many lives destroyed. Yet, it was also true that parents needed at least as much as ever a safe place to send their children for a few hours a day, and the children themselves needed a break from the grief and anger of the summer. Salah and other Lajee Center leaders decided to go ahead with the summer camp. But Salah had a slight adjustment in mind. Rather than a t-shirt emblazoned with Lajee's logo, as each child participant usually received, this year they would receive one that had on it a famous line of Mahmoud Darwish's poetry, in beautiful calligraphy: "On this land is what makes life worth living." Young and old wore it with pride. This t-shirt epitomized the way that Salah believed in living with dignity even in difficult circumstances. He believed fiercely in the beauty and potential of his homeland and its children. We honor his memory with our continued work together as we continue to serve his children and other children in his community.



COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLNESS

Our community health program Health for Palestine (H4P) has trained community members from Aida and Al-Azza refugee camps as Community Health Workers (CHWs), to provide home-visiting medical support to residents with diabetes and high blood pressure. H4P is beginning to focus on supporting the CHWs to also provide basic psychosocial support. Since our regular home visits began in March 2018, CHWs have helped patients address both diabetes and high blood pressure. Compared with patients of UN medical clinics (UNRWA) in the Middle East region, of whom only 28% are under good diabetic control with a Hemoglobin A1C <7, 55% of H4P patients now have their diabetes under control. Since January 2019, nearly half of the patients served by H4P have experienced a significant drop in blood pressure. Still, psychosocial stress is unavoidable. People endure generations of settler colonial dispossession, live in the shadow of a military base, and face arrests, military raids, and incarceration. The Palestinian Resilience Research Collective (PRRC), a multifaceted coalition of Palestinian health professionals and activists, has developed an approach to psychosocial care to train CHWs to support their patients in these challenging contexts of continual trauma and oppression. Devin Atallah, Assistant Professor of Psychology at University of Massachusetts Boston and a founder of the PRRC, has co-developed this psychosocial manual rooted in Palestinian cultural, anti-racist, and decolonial methods of healing to be provided by the CHWs as trained members of the local community. The last few weeks have been especially stressful for Palestinians in these communities. As Hamza Abed Rabbo, a social worker with the CHW program, said, "Many Palestinians feel guilty because they are still alive and not suffering compared to the people in Gaza and Jerusalem. Most people spent the Ramadan Eid in front of their television or phone screens following all the events. People experience a secondary kind of shock as they try not to miss any developments. They also began feeling indifferent about the virus and attended protests and vigils without concern for becoming sick, because they were more concerned with their fellow countrypeople." These events show again that addressing the psychosocial dimensions of health is integral to the overarching CHW project.

THE NEWS FROM AIDA REFUGEE CAMP: PROTESTS, STRIKES, COMMEMORATION



On Tuesday, May 18, Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line participated in a Strike for Dignity to express their refusal of Israel's ferocious violence and their commitment to Palestinian unity. Nidal Al-Azza, director of the Bethlehem-based refugee rights organization BADIL — Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights and a co-founder of Lajee Center, emphasized in a text message that the strike was led by youth leadership rather than by parties and institutions of either Palestinians citizens of Israel or Palestinians in the West Bank. He wrote, "The strike was a youth initiative in both sides of the Green Line... The youth call for rendering this day of strike a

day of actions to raise awareness of Palestinian collective / national identity and actions against colonial power (Israeli forces) was a significant step. As such, I can say that this strike day illustrated the power of youth (the new generation) and the power of sense of collectivity among them." He [spent](#) part of the day conversing with the younger generation in his neighborhood about their visions of history and justice.

In Aida, participation in the strike was robust. As Lajee's interim director and long-time Media Unit director, Mohammad Al-Azza, said, "Everyone in Aida was committed to the strike. The stores were all closed, and many people participated in the march, including with Lajee Center's contingent. Everyone must contribute in the shadow of the dereliction of the Palestinian factions in the West Bank. All that happened occurred without organization from any political faction." On that day of strike, in Bethlehem, at least 13 Palestinians were injured by ["tutu" .22 caliber](#) bullets, 17 by rubber coated metal bullets, and 81 by tear gas.

This day of striking was a culmination of recent actions in Aida and nearby communities. As an inspiring collective of Palestinian citizens of Israel gathered in Sheikh Jarrah over the last few weeks to stand against the ethnic cleansing of this historic neighborhood, many residents of Aida expressed their longing to join in the protests. But they knew that they could not do so, due to Israel's closure policies and criminalization of mobility. Members of Lajee Center participated in a Bethlehem-based action in solidarity with those in Sheikh Jarrah. During Ramadan, additional permits are sometimes issued to allow people to pray in Jerusalem. This year, though, few could go to Jerusalem both because of a lack of such permits and because Israel has restricted non-vaccinated people from entering. Worse still, Israeli forces attacked Palestinians in prayer at Al-Aqsa Mosque on one of the most holy nights of the year during Ramadan.

Even when they were apparently distant from events, Palestinians in Bethlehem were not isolated from them. When Hamas rockets began to fly toward Israeli cities, Palestinians in Bethlehem could hear the explosions. As Israel's war on Gaza began, Palestinians in Aida once again took to the



streets to reject this ferocious violence and challenge the army on their own turf. In day and night protests, Palestinians challenged the wall around the camp. One night a young man was arrested at dawn as the army shot tear gas into the streets around sleeping residents.



In a stunning confluence, Israel's bloody attacks on Gaza coincided with both the Eid feast at the end of Ramadan and Nakba Day, the May 15 commemoration of Palestinians' mass dispossession starting in 1948. Families found t-shirts designed in 2014, when Ramadan Eid also coincided with a massive Israeli attack on Gaza and passed them down to the child who would now fit them: "Our Holiday is With Gaza" they read. Regular protests began again on the main road. Environment Unit Director

Shatha Al-Azza noted with pride, "The only flag that has been flying is the Palestinian flag" as opposed to any flags of the political parties, and she remarked that the participation of women and girls is again very high. On Nakba Day itself, a procession embarked from Aida to join other processions in Bethlehem. Usually, Lajee Center hosts a kite flying contest for children on the occasion of Nakba Day, but this year, both the political situation and the weather meant that few kites were in the air: Parents were reluctant to send kids to fly kites near the wall, where this action usually happens, and the wind did not cooperate either. What comes next, in terms of the terrifying Israeli violence in Gaza or the inspiring Palestinian protests in so many places? People are hopeful that the ceasefire brokered on Thursday, May 20, will hold. They are listening to the moving statements of US members of Congress like Rep. Rashida Tlaib and Senator Bernie Sanders. And perhaps most significantly, Palestinians are circulating a [Manifesto of Dignity and Hope](#) that confirms Palestinian unity and commitment to liberation despite geographic fragmentation.



Photos: Nakba Day commemoration in Aida Camp, Mohammad Al-Azza; a scene from a dawn arrest and the hydroponics garden, courtesy of Lajee Center.

THE SIXTH ANNUAL WALK FOR WATER

This year, the COVID crisis has again prevented us from gathering in person. Due to the Israeli aggression in Gaza, Palestinians are in a time of grief. Yet, we are deeply appreciative of the generosity and energy of our walkers, who number over 125. On May 22, we will gather briefly for updates from our partners in Aida. We also encourage you to share photos of your walks with us so we can share them on social media and in our next newsletter. As always, we are grateful for all that you do. As the situation improves, we will organize a celebration of our accomplishments together. And we truly look forward to gathering for an in person walk next year.