



Dear Supporters

Firstly our grateful thanks for your support, whether that has been by providing financial help, or simply by attending one of our events. We apologise for not being in touch for some time, but rest assured that the Trustees have been working very hard on behalf of STEPS.

As you know the University of St Andrews agreed in 2011 to meet the annual cost of the tuition fees for two post-graduate Palestinian students if STEPS met the living expenses of about £10,000 per student, per year. In the academic years 2012-13 and 2013-14 we were able to support one student, so our main focus over the last year has been to raise enough money to support two students for the academic year 2014-15. We have done this primarily by approaching grant giving bodies for one-off donations, while continuing to encourage monthly donations to make the charity sustainable in the long term.

By the end of May, with your help, we were delighted to have raised enough money to enable us to achieve this goal. It was with great excitement that we contacted the two successful students, one from Gaza and one from East Jerusalem. However, within days of awarding the scholarships, conflict broke out in Gaza and sadly neither of our students has been able to take up their place. This is obviously due to circumstances beyond our control and is deeply disappointing for all concerned.

The University of St Andrews has been very helpful throughout and has agreed to defer both places until the academic year 2015-16. We are hopeful, but by no means certain, that they will also agree to fund a further two places for next year. In the meantime we will continue to work towards this goal by building on our monthly donations. Can you help us with this by making STEPS known to your family, friends and colleagues?

This year we are also working to involve the student population more closely.

We would like to draw your attention to two forthcoming events:

- **On Saturday 11th October from 2.00pm to 3.00pm** in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Queen's Gardens, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9TA, there will be a poetry reading from 'A Bird is not a Stone', an anthology of contemporary Palestinian Poetry. You can find out more about it at <http://stanzapoetry.wordpress.com/2014/09/09/a-bird-is-not-a-stone-stanza-presents-palestinian-poetry-for-the-smhaff/>. This event is organised by StAnza, in aid of SMHAFF.

- **On Tuesday 18th November in the evening**, in St Andrews Town Hall, we plan to show a film, entitled 'Where should the birds fly?', accompanied by a buffet, to raise awareness of STEPS and to raise funds. More of this later.

To minimise our costs, many of you will have received this by e-mail. If you have received a paper copy but would be happy to receive communication by e-mail, please could you let us have your e-mail address by contacting our secretary at info@stepspalestine.org.uk.

We give you just a flavour of the e-mail exchange that has taken place with our students.

Firstly from our student in Gaza:

"To keep you updated, the situation is horrible here in Gaza as I am sure you know, and I have been struggling over the last days to find a secure place with my family away from the continuous shelling and bombardment. The increasing shortage of power, water and fuel supplies and the Israeli blockade are turning life in Gaza into a piece of hell. Not to mention the threat calls many people received, including some of my friends, to evacuate their houses before hitting it with a missile.

I must say that the support I had (from STEPS) has given me more hope and encouragement to move forward. I will remain optimistic to be in Scotland in time, although I have doubts that I may not be able to be there before October because of the ongoing war and continuous closure of the border crossings."

Then:

"I have had very confused feelings over the last week since I received your generous award, I was super happy to be selected for the scholarship which will certainly enable me to achieve my future goals, however I was soon gripped with a nightmare that I may not be able to arrive at the University of St. Andrews in due time, or may simply miss such an outstanding opportunity. One thing is certain which is I am not going to lose hope in pursuing education opportunities and progressing my ambitions towards building a better future for Gaza and Palestine.

Let's pray for the safety of the Palestinian people and hope for a better reality for all the people in this part of the world."

And later:

"While I am writing this email, a new circle of war is looming in the horizon, the Israeli tanks and warplanes have been since yesterday firing rockets and missiles into the Gaza

Strip in advance of a land invasion which has already been underway. During the last years, children and youngsters in Palestine have suffered the most and been subject to continuous physical and psychological abuse.

In Gaza, which has its own peculiar context, we have to constantly cope with multiple traumas and a never ending circle of fear, anxiety and despair. Of course, this war is just a new chapter in that tragic story and unfortunately won't be the last.

I am sure you are aware of the current situation in Palestine, and more particularly in Gaza, and this is why I wanted to thank you once more for giving me such a remarkable opportunity to join your reputable university and acquire an in-depth understanding of peace and conflict issues in a broader context.

It took me so long to respond to your emails, but that's only due to the frequent power cuts; as power is cut for almost 20 hours a day. Not to mention the daily feelings of helplessness and fear from being killed by a rocket or a missile coming down on your house out of nowhere."

And from our student in East Jerusalem:

"First of all, i would like to thank you all for everything you gave me, for everything you made me feel at the last couple of months. Being selected to the STEPS scholarship and to study in St Andrews is a dream to many people and a rare and a hard opportunity which comes once in a life time.

As much i was excited to pursue my studies as much i am afraid now on my family. Being a Palestinian resident in Jerusalem is very tough.".....

..."What made the situation worse, especially to my family, is that we received an order to demolish our house.....We have a crucial trial at the end of this month, which require us all to be together as a family."

"As i may have mentioned in STEPS application, i currently work in our family business (Farming) as the marketing manager (sell the products). My main goal of studying is to improve our business by taking the Msc of Management and Information Technology courses. This goal needs to wait.....,"

"...Now, i am putting all my efforts to minimize the losses. Our family business needs to survive and it will, but also it needs me especially now and not like anytime before."

Taking a decision to pursue my studies is not my decision anymore. Automatically it involves my family, friends, business, farmers, suppliers, clients and everyone in my life. I would be selfish not to think in any other "First of all, i would like to thank you all for

everything you gave me, for everything you made me feel at the last couple of months. Being selected to the STEPS scholarship and to study in St Andrews is a dream to many people and a rare and a hard opportunity which comes once in a life time.

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