

World Week of Peace highlights “culture of love and resilience”



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From Geneva to Bethlehem and across the world, the World Council of Churches (WCC) World Week of Peace in Israel and Palestine inspired gatherings for prayer, reflection and action last week.

Among the commemorations, a group gathered on 22 September at the Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center in Bethlehem to pray for peace.

The event, under the theme “Enhancing Hope in the Face of Darkness,” was held in cooperation with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

The keynote speaker, Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, opened the prayer service with words of hope from Romans 4: “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”

With the separation wall looming in the background, the group heard inspirational examples of hope under occupation from local leaders including Bethlehem Armenian Priest Aspet, Christian Orthodox member Dr Peter Qumri, Muslim Imam Maher Assaf, Presbyterian pastor Victor Makari and other ecumenical representatives of the West Bank and Jerusalem community.

Wi'am director and founder Zoughbi Zoughbi had this to say about hope in the face of darkness: "Where do we find hope? We have become a culture of love and resilience, and we are enhanced by your presence, EAPPI, and from the community across the globe."

In Geneva, 12 Faces of Hope

In Geneva, the "12 Faces of Hope" photo exhibition at the Ecumenical Centre also inspired people to reflect on what gives them a sense of hope. Visitors to the exhibit included participants in an Ecumenical Officers meeting, as well as community members and other WCC friends and partners.

Four people from three different continents helped lead a ceremony opening the exhibit; they included WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit; Brighton Lutengano Killewa, secretary general of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania; Berit Hagen Agøy, general secretary of the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations in the Church of Norway; and the Very Rev. Archimandrite Jack Khalil of the University of Balamand in Lebanon.

Tveit said the exhibit features people who are witnesses of hope. "The best way to mark the tragedy of the 50 years of occupation is to listen carefully to those witnesses of hope who live under occupation and who experience the grave consequences in their daily lives," he said. "No people should experience occupation."

It is never too late to end occupation, he added "The strongest voices for hope are those that come from within, from the context that seems to be a hopeless situation," Tveit said. "The hope brought to us in this exhibition of these 12 faces of hope is the strongest sign of a living hope. They speak of love and dreams of life together with others in peace. This is the power that can move hearts and change history."

As Berit Hagen Agøy, gazed at the photos, Agøy reflected how, in terrible conditions where most people feel helpless, someone always stands up against the abuse of power.

The people portrayed in the exhibition are Palestinians and Israelis who are victims of the occupation. They are sharing their thoughts as they live in the Holy Land amid conflict and injustice.

"These people – you will find them all over the world, in every conflict area - are willing to sacrifice their own life to save others," Agøy observed, then asked: "What motivates such people: is it faith, ideology or a particular strength?"

Research has found that there is nothing special about these people, continued Agøy.

“When you ask them, why they are risking so much and working so hard, to help others, they answer: this is the human thing to do,” Agøy said. “For me these people represent hope. We see the faces of 12 such people here on the posters. They are just decent human beings doing the right thing.”

There is nothing stronger than love, Agøy concluded. “Our hope is built on love, Agøy said. “God’s decent people will keep the hope alive that one day there will be peace and justice - in Palestine and Israel.”

[World Week of Peace in Palestine and Israel](#)

[Exhibition "12 faces of hope" in Geneva](#)