

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

July 2015 Newsletter



Greetings from Bishop Suheil Dawani

Dear Friends,

During July of last year the Gaza strip has endured a deadly and destructive war which lasted for almost two months.

In recognition to the outstanding work of our staff in Al Ahli Arab Hospital (AAH), we would like to dedicate this edition of the Diocesan newsletter to those staff for their courage, commitment, hard work and service during the war and beyond. Ms Suhaila Tarazi and her senior management team have done wonders!

You will be able to read about some important activities in which these staff members have accomplished throughout the past twelve months; first with the humanitarian intervention during the war and then the recovery and rehabilitation activities that took place the months following. After presenting you with some accounts and memoirs of our staff, we would like you to meet some of our beneficiaries; those who God called us to serve and whose lives have been changed as a result of the ministry of AAH.

This ministry would not have been possible without the generous support of friends, partners, Dioceses and churches, and individuals. Programs and Projects would not have been complete without their immediate response to our appeals.

God has abundantly blessed us and blessed our ministry in Gaza because of these partners and friends.

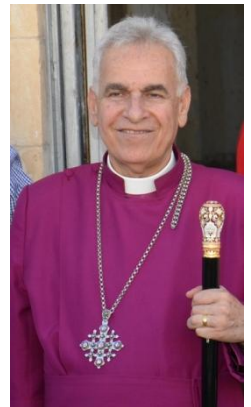
We urge you to continue praying for the people of Gaza and our ministry there.

Pray that Al Ahli Arab Hospital continues to be a peace and healing haven to all those who enter it. Pray that our ministry continues to bring hope to those people, not only physically but also emotionally.

Finally, pray for peace and justice in Gaza and across our region.

Salaam, Peace

+ Suheil Dawani



Arab Ahli Hospital, Looking back One Year Later



**Interview with Ms. Suhaila Tarazi
Director of AAH**

By Sami Khoury, EDJ Programs Director

To start, briefly tell us your reflections on AAH in the last year?

Looking back at the last few months, it was probably one of the most challenging periods that we had endured here at the hospital as far as I remember.

The time during the war was extremely challenging: the big influx of injured men, women, elderly and children, the shortages of fuel and medicaments, the immense needs of the displaced, the security and safety of our staff. The period thereafter was not much easier but of course less in intensity.

We thank God the hospital was able to function during and throughout the war till this very minute despite some structural damages as a result of shrapnel and indirect airstrikes to the surrounding areas. Damages were primarily in the ventilation system, many windows broken, exterior walls and steam pipeline.

Our services and resources were strained at times but with God's grace and with the help of many of our friends who came through and continue to come through, we have managed. This support came at a time when we needed more staff to help at the hospital, more fuel for our generators for electricity and more financial support for emergency care, medical care in orthopedic services and Burn Unit care.

What were the main interventions during the past year at Al Ahli Hospital?

Our ministry is mainly driven by a passage from the bible in Mathew 25: "truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me".

The Ahli Hospital is open to all, irrespective of their faith, social class or political affiliation. Our ministry is to reach out to those who are hurting, especially the most vulnerable who have difficulty accessing medical care. Al-Ahli is there to heal the sick and the suffering.

In the past year, our ministry has been focusing on the injured resulting from the war and also on people who lost their homes and all their belongings, children who are traumatized by the bombardment and affected by the loss of their beloved ones are also in need of attention and care.

Work at Al-Ahli was primarily divided into two phases:

The first, **humanitarian Intervention** was basically the period from

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the time of the onset of the war in July until December 2014. During this time, we focused on admissions of emergency / trauma care especially in our general surgery, orthopedic and burn units. Our mission was not only on the medical care, but also, we were able to distribute food baskets and bottled water, hygiene kits, provides shelter to families of patients (those who were displaced), infant / new borne packages as well as first aid bags.

The second is what we refer to as the **recovery phase** which was basically a mix between continuing the humanitarian interventions but more recovery in helping people restore their lives.

The primary focus of the recovery was about continuing caring for the patients who first came during the war but needed further support in terms of surgery, burn care etc... and also provide free health care to the vulnerable who live in a very striking economic situation. Furthermore, we provided psychosocial care especially for children who were traumatized by the war and involved their mothers during these sessions as a way of helping both to gradually restore their lives.



What are the future plans for the next six months to a year?

The overall situation in the Gaza strip has worsened in the past year. Today there is more unemployment, Gaza is still under siege, there is more poverty than ever, thousands of people are homeless because of the war, children and youth are traumatized.

Therefore, the coming few months are going to also be critical for the ministry of Ahli Hospital.

We aim to continuing support for our patients and those who have started their physical and psychosocial healing journey with us. Psychosocial care continues to be an area of concern where we hope to continue to provide group therapy to mothers and children who continue to suffer of post war trauma.

We hope to step up our outreach free medical mission from two days to three days per week where we will be able to go to follow-up not only on our existing patients but also help those who are not able to arrive to the hospital for one reason or another.

We will also continue providing medical services focusing on children with different burns and those injured who are in need of follow-up surgical procedures: post war patients in orthopedics and burn unit care.

Many of those who came during the war to AAH continue to return for follow up.

Moreover, Ahli Hospital would like to carry on enhancing the skills of the unemployed new graduates and youth by giving them the chance to be trained with pay at Ahli for 3 to 12 months time.

Finally we are also working on sustaining our chronic medical care. This includes three services, first is reach to more children in our underweight clinic (those who are currently suffering from malnutrition), second support the chronically ill elderly women and the third is the early detection of breast cancer through screening, follow-up, and health education.

If you could summarize the three main learnings thus far from this past war on Gaza?

Power shortage:

For Gazans power shortage is expected day and night even without a war. During the war, it even got worse. At the hospital we have two fuel run generators that had to work around the clock to make up for the major blackouts during the heap of the war. While the generators were for the most part efficient there were times that we had to stop one of the two in order to avoid a breakdown and save on fuel until our fuel reservoir was refilled.



The main learning here is to make sure that electricity is not disrupted and to start investing into green energy and using solar panels to avoid not only the breakdown of generators but also avoid the disruption of the use due to lower fuel levels in the reservoirs.

Staffing and movement of staff:

A large proportion of the staff lives in the southern part of Gaza city and those were unable to report to work due to the ongoing hostilities. As an alternative we had to hire additional staff from other areas who were available and live closer to the hospital despite the transportation risks. We could have hired these staff faster if we had their contact information ready ahead of time.

The biggest learning from this lesson is to have a roster of staff as part of the disaster preparedness plan ready to call in if such similar case occurs

Shortage in disposables and medicines for use at the hospital during emergency:

We have a big storage for medicines and disposables that we replenish very often for daily use and that are able to use in the case of war crisis. During this war what was needed at the hospital was much more than what was stored and needed to be replenished at the heap of the war several times.

What we have learned as a result is to expand this storage and replenish it with more of these items to avoid running into such similar future situations.

What would you like to say to all of those who stood by you during the war and the period later?

There are many of those!

Let me start first with our AAH staff and volunteers: I want to thank them for their hard work, courage and dedication especially during the 51 days of war on Gaza.

Their passion for care and love of the ministry at AAH is what kept our service so genuine and stable in the midst of the most challenging time. Their love for their work and for the people stood out.

I want to give tribute to **Mrs. Neveen El Attar**, one of the nurses who died during the war at her home trying to protect her children. She and her husband both died at the same moment leaving behind two little girls; a six year old and a two year old. I want to ask our friends to especially pray for these two girls-

To all our donors, partners, friends and church groups around the world: I want to express my sincere admiration and appreciation to them all. Their immediate response and support have come when it was mostly needed. Without their love, support and contribution, both cash and in-kind we would not have been able to conduct the planned activities on the ground to serve the communities especially the most needy and vulnerable.

For colleagues at the Diocese of Jerusalem, let me start by thanking our Archbishop Suheil Dawani, for his solidarity and commitment to the ministry of AAH in Gaza. His visit to the hospital after the war has given us so much confidence and an expression of his commitment and appreciation to what we do; to our finance and program development teams who have supported us and communicated on our behalf during a very difficult time.

Finally, there are many prayer warriors out there, our unsung heroes who have uplifted us during the war and continue to pray for us. Thank you- your prayers have made miracles in our lives.

How can we ask AAH friends and partners to continue to prayer for the Ministry of AAH and for the coming period?

I invite churches, individuals and partners to uplift our ministry for the next six months to one year which I have referred to earlier in this interview. Whether it is medical care or follow-up or psychosocial care or our ongoing programs such as underweight children etc... we continue to covet their prayers for this ministry. I also invite them to pray for the overall situation in Gaza and for ending the siege imposed for the past 8 years. That it may come to an end and that Gazans are able to live a life free of restrictions. This was also one of the reasons we have had a very slow reconstruction of homes damaged or destroyed during the war. Pray that the pledged money for Gaza from donors around the world is committed and homes rebuilt.

Brief background History of Arab Ahli Hospital:

Ahli Arab Hospital is located in the Gaza Strip area of Palestine.

It was originally built in 1882 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) England in Gaza city. In 1907, the main building was built with 24 beds in Gaza City. This hospital was destroyed during the First World War, and was rebuilt by CMS. The Baptist Church ran the hospital from 1951 until 1982 until it was returned to the original owner The Episcopal Diocese in Jerusalem and the Middle East in 1982.



During the first Intifada 1987 it was the only non-Israeli hospital run by Palestinians in Gaza working with the community.

Today, the work of healing continues as the hospital is one of the general hospitals in the Gaza strip with 80 beds capacity.

Gaza Quick Facts-

Total area: 146 miles

Total Population: 1.8 million
'locked in', denied free access to the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territory and the outside world

Nearly 80% of Gaza's population receives some form of international aid, mostly food assistance.

Unemployment rate (2014) 43% on average; Youth unemployment exceeded 60%
The highest in the world

Israel imposed a land, sea and air Blockade: 8 years
Reduced Gaza's Gross Domestic Product by 50%

Gazans have lived through 3 wars in 6 years-
2009, 2012, 2014



"War Memoires": it was just good to know that you are still alive!



By Samira Farah
AAH Administrator Assistant

If you ask anyone in Gaza about the time and the day when the war started, each of them can tell you exactly when it started- 7th of July 2014 and lasted for 51 days.

A year has passed since the actual war ended but for many it still continues till this very day! Each person in Gaza carries sad and scary memories.

For me, at least, I cannot say that all scars and sign of trauma have all healed. One of those memories happened during one of August 2014 nights- It was one of the most difficult and scariest nights I have ever experienced in my life.

It must have been around Eleven pm when I was sitting at home with my family in pitch black due to the power shortage. Outside our house we could hear commotion, an unusual noise in the streets around us.

We could not help but run outside to check what is happening? What are the noises about?

The situation was beyond tense; panic and chaos were all over the neighborhood.

People were running in the streets and carrying with them what they could carry out of their homes.

One of the neighbors exclaimed: "have you not heard? A warning was sent to the area asking the building next door to clear immediately". This large building is only 50 meters away from our home!

If you are lucky, a warning is sent by the Israeli army through SMS messages or flyers before bombing- at least this is what they have done during the war. If you are less fortunate, you would get a warning shot or shell and most of the time, you just don't know what and when it is coming.

This, I vividly remember thinking: it is real and serious; now we have to figure out what to do. What is the fastest and safest thing to do for protection?

Our neighbor advised us to stay at home because at this point it was too risky to leave. The warning timeframe was too short and the airstrike can happen any time.

We decided instead to gather in one room on the ground floor. As soon as we got there, we heard a sudden very grisly horrifying loud explosion! It was followed by many more explosions all over the area.

We knew that the bombardment started so we sat there for at least the next few hours.

This is what helplessness means; waiting for our unknown destiny! Airstrikes continued for the next 3 hours where everything around us shook because of the bombing and once in a while you would hear sounds of windows' glass breaking all over the place. A few of us even fell on our heads but praise God no one was hurt.

We spent the whole night in terror! We could not sleep even for minutes. It was unbelievably crucial time to stay awake. Children were crying and screaming while we were sitting there speechless- the only words we could say were to try comfort and assure those poor children that things will be alright the next day- even if we were not sure about that.

In the morning we could see the result: Widows' glass of our home was broken and scattered all over the floor. Just by looking outside the windows I realized how devastated our neighborhood had become.

I then realized **it was just good to know that you are alive!**

Though I did not sleep all night, I had to put aside my fatigue and trauma to get to the Arab Ahli hospital to help those in need. The previous days were very busy so I could not allow fear trap me at home. It was not easy to drive to the hospital; mind you it was very dangerous.

I sighed when I reached Arab Ahli Hospital. I felt I was reaching to my second safe haven. I was extremely moved to see that the other employees had also made it that morning. Mission and duty drove us that morning and it was to help our people in Gaza.

2014 War on Gaza Quick Facts- Infograph

Duration: 51 Consecutive days

Death toll: 2251 Palestinians mostly civilians including, 551 children and 299 women

**Palestinians Injured: 11,231 including 3436 children
10 percent of who suffer permanent disability**

**Housing Units destroyed: more than 18,000
12,620 totally destroyed
6,455 severely damaged**

**Caused the largest displacement recorded in Gaza since 1967
About 100,000 persons (17,670 families)**

Less than 1% of the construction materials required to rebuild houses destroyed and damaged during hostilities, and to address natural population growth, have so far entered Gaza

At least 373,000 children require direct and specialized psychosocial support on the basis of families who have experienced death, injury or loss of home.

419 businesses and workshops were damaged, 128 completely destroyed

The time when it hurts most is when you help others!



Personal Account by Dr Maher Ayyad AAH Medical Director

As a doctor and surgeon I see a lot; if someone comes to the hospital it is most likely that they have pain if not on top of that misery.

In my last thirty years at Arab Ahli Hospital this has been the case but I have to make sure that this pain is healed and misery is finished even if the care process is prolonged. My role of caring for the other is driven by my personal faith in Christ. "I can do all things through him who gives me strength" Philippians 4:13.

During times of war my work gets even more interesting and challenging. Not only in terms of streams of people who are rushed to the hospitals but in the variation in the complexities of the cases.

Thus far, I have witnessed three wars in the past six years; in 2009, 2012 and 2014. As you can imagine, there is nothing pretty about war.

Each war has had its pains and cases but during the 2014 was one of the most challenging where we literally had to expect the unexpected. One of these cases remain with me till this very day.

While I was on duty last August, I was about to complete an operation on a wounded man but I got an urgent call and a need for immediate intervention and attention.

I walked into the operation room and I see a five year old boy lying in bed. He was referred to us from another hospital. He had fifty percent deep burn all over his body.

'Doctor, please take care of this boy. He is my neighbor'; said a man standing by the boy.

Neighbor? I thought- but why his neighbor? Where are his parents?

It is not unusual during the war to have non-family members next to patients but for children and especially this one, I had the urge to ask.

'He was the only survivor of his family after an F16 aircraft bombarded their house, his parents and his three brothers and sisters all were killed' the man continued.

I stood there for a moment not knowing where to start: to comfort him emotionally or treat him physically? I was speechless- that I remember very vividly.

From the medical history and examination I found out that he had a major abdominal surgery for a congenital biliary malformation- I also found out that he was living on supportive medications.

At that point we all knew that his journey of healing would take time, both emotionally and physically.

We did all what we could to comfort him and care for him.

After his recovery from his shock he realized that none of his family members were next to him.

He cried constantly, refusing to eat- He wanted his mom and dad to feed him.

This is one of the few times that I felt that my intervention was **the time when it hurts most is when you help others**. It was painful and unforgettable. I don't ever remember crying while trying to help a patient but in the case of this boy I could not help it.

Not long ago I saw him again at the hospital. He had returned for follow up-

He was of course much better than when I saw him last summer but his emotional scars were much more obvious than those physical.

AAH Achievements One Year- Infograph

1799 Patients at the emergency room

472 Injured Patients to Emergency Room

190 of the injured that were admitted to the Hospital

936 follow up visits
for injured and vulnerable patients

2776 days of care

3809 burned cases
war related and vulnerable families

17272 cases reached during free medical missions
50% of them are war related cases

850 cases visited the hospital for outpatient dressing

7662 laboratory tests

1833 X-ray examinations

3550 beneficiary in psychosocial program
More than 80% were children and the rest were women

1241 food parcels distributed

250 hygiene kits and first aid bags distributed

11,000 Sessions of Rehabilitation
Physical, occupational therapy etc...

Hiring of 30 additional staff members to support relief and recovery operations

Purchasing of more than 73,500 liters of fuel for the generators



Stories of beneficiaries from our Programs...

Zakaria

The month of Ramadan is such a special family gathering time. Despite the war on Gaza in 2014, Zakaria, wife and children were all invited by his sister to the family house. The mission of the gathering was to help out in the preparation of pastries, bread and cakes.

All products from the fifty kilos of wheat would all be taken to poor families staying in shelters for the displaced as a result of the war in Sabra area of the Gaza strip.

“Everyone had lined up to help; my wife was the first in line. All of a sudden, we heard fighter jet planes approaching our area and then there was a big explosion; the house shook hard and then was filled with heavy dust and screams”, Said Zakaria.

Not sure what had happened, Zakaria, was injured as a result of the strike and tried to walk through the living room to check on the other family members. The next thing that he remembers was waking up at Al Shifa hospital for treatment of his injuries. He later learned that he had lost 10 family members among which were his wife and sister.

The family members that survived the strike were his children. But they all suffered severe injuries and burns and had to stay at the hospital for treatment. One of his children had suffered severe burns that his left leg was under the risk of amputation. Due to the overload of injured people at the hospital, many were referred to other hospitals in Gaza city.

“To our luck, my children were sent to Arab Ahli Hospital who continued their treatment there for more than 30 days. With a lot of encouragement from the Ahli Hospital staff, doctors, nurses and God’s care the situation of my children was slowly getting better. As a result of the special and intensive care of my son’s leg, doctors at Al-Ahli decided not to amputate his leg” Said Zakaria.

Till this very day, Ahli Hospital Burn Unit staff continue to treat Zakaria’s children and provide them with ointments and medications.



Rihab

Rihab, 59 from Shija'iyya was introduced to the Arab Ahli Hospital in 2013. She was encouraged by a grassroots organization in Gaza city to visit the Hospital's screening for early detection of breast cancer program.

Few days later she visited the hospital and went through the screening.

Following a series of health checks and a biopsy, to her shock Rihab was diagnosed with breast cancer and the journey of pain and suffering started.

First she had to get her right breast removed and then immediately start a long treatment process.

"Having to travel outside the strip to get the proper care was humiliating and difficult. I had to stand in queues to leave Gaza for hours".

As soon as she got back in Gaza, the 2014 war on Gaza started and the neighborhood where she lived with her family was one of the places mostly affected during the war.

"The area where we lived was very close to the seam zone and was continuously shelled. Life had become so difficult during the war that during one of the nights and even under heavy bombing and shelling we all had decided to run out of the house during the middle of the night".

A few days later Rihab learned the entire building where she had lived with her children and grandchildren was completely destroyed. The family had become displaced and then homeless.

"I started to become hopeless in life" said Rihab. "First my cancer diagnosis and treatment, then our displacement and then losing our home; I reached the point when I felt most helpless I could have ever felt in my whole life".

The Arab Ahli staff learned about her case and immediately called her to help through the women psychosocial program. The program focused primarily on group counseling and sharing among women to talk about their experiences, pain, sorrows and the miracle for having survived.

After Rihab went home following the first meeting although she felt slightly better however she was skeptical and lost the desire to follow up in the session. But then she thought to herself, maybe she had nothing to lose at that point, it might just be worth to sit through one more session- one more only and then decide.

"During the second session I had the opportunity to talk among women who were also cancer patients. But for the first time in months, I felt that I was being heard by the staff!"

I felt that I got something out of it. The counselors were moving to the core of the issues and helping us as a group to rise up and keep hope. The more I heard from the other women, the less I felt burdened", Said Rihab.

Shahd

Like any child, Shahd, was playing innocently with her dolls around the house on July 18, 2014. Shielded with her resilience to the sounds of bombing and shelling outside her family house, she carried on playing. She spent most of her playtime in the staircase spreading her play home set up between two floors.

It was not long before playtime was suddenly interrupted by a loud explosion that ripped through the house while quickly filled with heavy dust. A warplane missile hit the building next door.

"I was in the first floor when it all happened. I ran to look for Shahd because after the explosion I heard a loud scream. Shahd had fallen on the staircase from the second floor to the first floor", said Rania, Shahd's mother.



The intensity of the explosion and her falling caused her a head and an injury in her left arm. Shahd was rushed to Al Shifa Hospital where she stayed for four days.

Due to the enormous amount of people at Al Shifa and after stabilizing her situation, Shahd had to be transferred to another hospital for further treatment and rehabilitation.

That was when her journey with Arab Ahli Hospital started and continues till this very day.

Initially, she had to undergo several operations at the Orthopedic Department of AAH where she stayed for 7 consecutive days.

"In her eyes, I could see the pain and suffering but at the same time I could see strength and determination" said Suhaila Tarazi, Director General of the Hospital.

"Quality care is what we strive to give to all our patients and beneficiaries but we have a special place in our hearts and ministry for children in our hospital; they suffer the most during these wars", continued Suhaila.

Shahd was ready to embark on a journey of rehabilitation where she spent the next month at the Physical Therapy Department.

"It was not long before we could see Shahd's situation improve", said Rania. *"Thanks to the kindness and professionalism of the staff"*, she concluded.

Shahd went through several follow up visits to AAH. She was operated again in June 2015, one year after the war.

She is one of 9 family members living in Gaza city; her mother is a housewife and dad has been unemployed for quite some time.

Ahmed

In the heat of bombing and shelling during the war on Gaza in July 2014, Ahmed, 15 years old, and his family were forced to leave their home in Shajjaiya neighborhood. The neighborhood was so heavily bombarded to the point that their home was severely damaged and uninhabitable.

The search for alternatives had to be taken care of very quickly through moving into the city to shelter the family composed of 17 people.

Grabbing some of their personal stuff with them, the family had moved into an apartment to what they had thought was safer than their own.

The entire neighborhood had suffered severe water shortages and power blackouts for long hours.

“I will never forget the moment when Ahmed had to go down in search for water” Fatima, his mother recalled. “Ahmed took with him an empty gallon and went next to our neighboring building in attempt to fetch clean water; it was during that time when we heard three very loud explosions”

The family learned later that Ahmed was hit by shrapnel in the head as a result of the bombing. He was rushed to the hospital where he was in coma for 17 days. He however was among the few lucky ones transferred to Jordan hospitals for immediate care.

After staying there for a week, he was returned to the Gaza Strip as he started to show initial signs of improvement.

“Upon our return to the Gaza Strip, we were advised by the doctors to take Ahmed to the Ahli Arab Hospital to continue his journey of rehabilitation”. His mother said.

“When Ahmad came to Arab Ahli Hospital, he could barely speak or walk alone” commented Dr. Maher Ayyad, Medical Director at AAH. *“He urgently needed a series of physical and occupational therapy sessions to start the rehabilitation process.”*

For the following month, Ahmed received more than one hundred physiotherapy sessions along with multiple psychosocial group support sessions by counselors and specialists.

The effort was well worth it. Ahmed was able to speak clearly and walk independently. The combination of physiotherapy and psychosocial support did him well both physically and psychologically. The sessions helped him overcome many of the problems and restore his self- confidence.

Today, Ahmed is still waiting to undergo a tendon transplant operation at the Arab Ahli Hospital orthopedic department.

More stories and information are available at: www.j-diocese.org Email enquiries to: info@j-diocese.org

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Let us know what you think?

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