

Newsletter 16

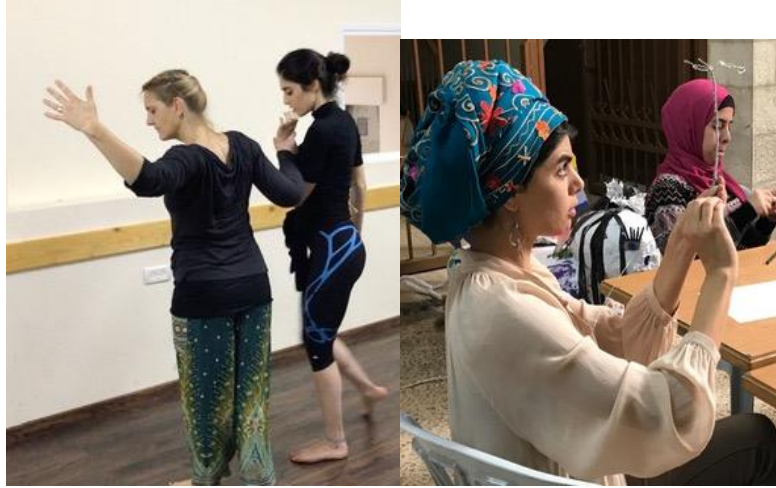
Dear Friends

In November 2016 young people, artists, educators and others from the UK, Holland, Macedonia, Sweden, Cyprus, Greece and Palestine gathered in Bethlehem for the Congress, *Palestine in the Eyes of Indra*. The event was sponsored by the European Union (EU) and we were saddened during the week to hear of the death of Dr Izzat Ayoub, the EU officer who patiently and supportively guided the project through the maze of EU bureaucracy. Our thoughts go to Dr Ayoub's family at this difficult time.

Once again we are deeply grateful to Marina Barham and her colleagues in Al Harah Theatre for hosting us with such generosity and kindness. We were also saddened and disappointed that our colleagues in India and Kosovo were denied visas by the Israeli authorities and so were unable to attend the Congress.

The November Congress followed a similar pattern to the earlier event in the summer. In the mornings participants took part in a range of arts workshops with Alaa (circus), Jules (dance), Farouze (puppet making) and Evdokimos (theatre).





The workshops culminated in a speedily and proficiently rehearsed performance in Manger Square, Bethlehem which, as in July, attracted a large and engaged audience.



The afternoon was given over to presentations from the participating groups about their own work. Presentations included a deeply moving re-enactment of events and issues arising for Palestinian young people as they pass through Israeli checkpoints; a disturbing film from Macedonia highlighting tensions, divisions and violence within that society; an insightful conflict resolution exercise from the Dutch participants and a theatrically fascinating acrobatic performance from the Swedish group.



The wanted 18

On Saturday evening we were treated to a showing of the brilliant Palestinian film, *The Wanted 18*. As one reviewer wrote: 'The film tells an extraordinary and true story, the Israeli army's pursuit of 18 cows, whose independent milk production on a Palestinian collective farm was declared "a threat to the national security of the State of Israel". In response to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, a group of people from the town of Beit Sahour decide to buy 18 cows and produce their own milk as a co-operative. Their venture is so successful that the collective farm becomes a landmark, and the cows local celebrities - until the Israeli army takes note and declares that the farm is an illegal security threat. Consequently, the dairy is forced to go underground, the cows continuing to produce their "Intifada milk" with the Israeli army in relentless pursuit.' The film tells the story through a mixture of hilarious cartoon depictions of the cows, alongside inspiring real life interviews and accounts from those involved. Wonderful!



Hazbara

On another evening we were privileged to watch the new show from Al Harah Theatre, written and directed by Mirna Sakhleh. The play breaks into new ground for the company. Much Palestinian theatre focusses, understandably, on the impact of Occupation on the lives of citizens. *Hazbara* takes place within the confines of Israeli administrative and propaganda ministries. The term Hasbara refers to the public relations machinery used to disseminate positive information or propaganda about the State of Israel and its actions around the world. Through extensive research, reported and verbatim dialogue, the play uses satire and dark humour to explore the working methods of Israeli Hasbara, especially focusing on the manual handbook entitled 'The Israeli Global Language Dictionary', which explains the ploys, e.g. Hasbara trolls, used to skilfully manipulate information and news in favour of the Israelis.

Hazbara was chillingly and humorously acted by Faten Khoury, Nicola Zreineh, Osama Jaber and Rabie Hanani. Both *The Wanted* 18 and *Hazbara* illustrate the power of art and humour as unique and powerful 'weapons' in the struggle against Occupation.

Wadi Qilt and the Dead Sea

On the Sunday Marina had organised a challenging walk along parts of Wadi Qilt, the ancient path through the wilderness from Jerusalem to Jericho, which is the locus for such biblical stories as The Good Samaritan. The rocky path was tricky to

negotiate in places but the surrounding landscape was quite awesome and breathtaking. At the walk's conclusion we floated aimlessly in the Dead Sea before returning to Bethlehem.



Cultural sharing

On our last evening we held our customary cultural sharing jamboree. The underlying purpose of Indra Congress events is serious, however to remind ourselves that Indra's key resource lies in the playfulness of the creative arts, we hold one evening of sheer fun and celebration. This time the Swedes got us off to a galloping start with a witty, tongue in cheek account of the traditional Midsummer Madness celebrations, dragging the audience from their seats to participate in the ages old and hilarious frog dance!. A definite highlight of the evening was the skilful

and high energy performance of traditional Palestinian dance from George Matar and his colleagues, exhausting even to watch!

The Planning group: Breaking the bubble

Whilst participants engaged in morning workshops, a small group met with Tim Prentki and David to move forward discussions started earlier in July. Fresh energy and insight was injected into this process from new participants from Malta and Holland. Several of the new participants for Indra events asked during the week, 'why is this not known about more widely?' For the planning group this acted 'as a spur to prick the sides of our intent!'



A number of detailed objectives and proposals arose from the group:

The production of a three-minute trailer to introduce Indra to a wider audience.

A 30 minute documentary focussing on 'success stories', case studies of participating young people which will provide evidence for the impact of the Indra model.

Other issues focussed on nurturing partnerships and links, training programmes – including the idea of a certificated programme and the production of a register of arts practitioners, known to us, who work in the field of arts and conflict.

We have held two Congress events in Bethlehem this year and, according to feedback and evaluation, both these events have been life transforming for participants. We are deeply grateful to Marina Barham and her colleagues for hosting these rich experiences with such warmth, humour and patience. Several of us have returned home with fresh insight into the reality of life under Occupation and, despite the bleakness of the political situation, been profoundly

moved by the deep rooted spirit of hope which emanates from Marina and her colleagues. You are an inspiration to us all. Sukran.

David

With Tim and Dawn



The missing cow of Beit Sahour?