



A Message From Our President

I was born in Aleppo, Syria, and this year marks the 20th anniversary of my arrival in the United States. Bittersweet is a wild vine, and it reminds me of my feelings on this anniversary. I am a proud citizen of the United States and so happy to raise my 5 children here, and yet my heart is broken as I think of the ongoing tragedy in Syria and neighboring Palestine.

For over 17 years, Tree of Life has offered annual journeys to the land of Canaan. More than 500 have participated in these journeys, and I have found it very enriching to travel with a broad diversity of travelers – different races and religious affiliations as well as those of no particular faith identity. This has helped me to celebrate the rich diversity of our human family.

Also, Tree of Life offers yearly educational programs for which we have invited extraordinary visitors from Palestine to talk about their daily lives and their hopes for a better future.

For my 5 children, I want them to grow up in a world where they can be free of violence, xenophobia, and all the painful divisions in our human family. That's why I volunteer for Tree of Life as its President.

In our yearly journeys and annual programs, we have come to see that things over there will not change until we change the hearts and minds of people here and change the policies of our government. The \$8 to 10 million we give to Israel **per day** can and needs to be used as leverage to ensure that Israel respects the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I was raised in the historic and beautiful city of Aleppo, now in shambles from war. Despite this tragedy, I want to say how proud I am of my country. As a youth, I enjoyed track and field, especially the hurdles, representing my country in a number of races.

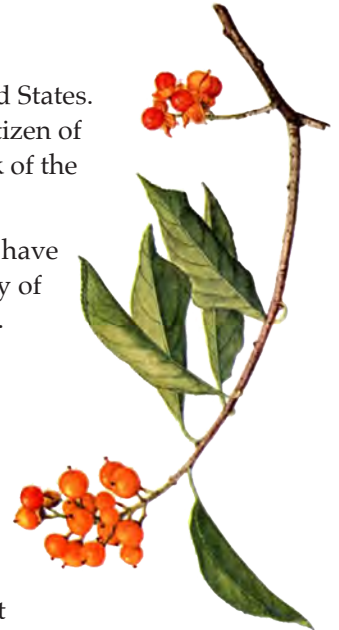
Now, as a mother, I have come to see that the only race that really matters is the Human Race. There are so many **hurdles** that need to be cleared. Racism, greed, corruption, and militarism have devastated my country. These are the "hurdles", the challenges we all must face.

My native language is Arabic, and I love the Arabic word "Sumud" which means Steadfast Perseverance. Sumud requires patience and impatience. It requires determination, resilience and tenacity.

In these challenging times, we need your **Sumud**. Please contribute to the work of Tree of Life Educational Fund, and if possible, **please consider a 3-year pledge**. This will be a great help as we make our plans for the future. We are most grateful for whatever your gift might be. Please use the enclosed pledge card and envelope.

Thank you for your support of Tree of Life Educational Fund!
Together we can make this a better world for our children!

Ghoufran Allababidi
President
Tree of Life Educational Fund



Tree Of Life's Response To COVID-19

During this difficult year as we have coped with COVID-19 and all the drama of an election year, it would have been so easy to be self-absorbed and oblivious to the devastating impact the pandemic has had on our Palestinian friends.

But once again, those of you in our Tree of Life community have proven the mettle of your spirit! We are so very grateful for the compassion, generosity and solidarity you have exemplified. We are proud to share with you some of the ways in which we have tried to respond.



Supplies in Gaza



Supplies for families in Palestine



The year 2020 has been tumultuous, between the COVID-19 pandemic and the global uprising against racial injustice. While the Israeli government has delayed its plans to annex major parts of occupied Palestinian land, we know that is still an imminent possibility.

Tree of Life rejects all forms of state violence and stands firmly in solidarity with those defending themselves from repression – from Minneapolis to Palestine.

Thankfully, Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank have been able to protect their communities during COVID-19. But that hasn't come without a cost. The lockdown has caused serious economic hardships. These hardships are significantly exacerbated by the Israeli occupation, funded by our US taxpayer dollars.

During this global health crisis, to show our solidarity with our Palestinian siblings, Tree of Life raised funds for food baskets for families in the West Bank.

We are proud to tell you that with your financial contributions, we raised \$22,527.75! On our behalf, our partners made deliveries of local supplies to those most in need.

We know these meals barely scratch the surface of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine, but we believe this act of solidarity is especially important while our government refuses to support Palestinians with financial assistance. At the same time, Tree of Life supporters across the US have been pressuring the federal government to resume much-needed humanitarian assistance for Palestinians, including funding for UNRWA, the UN agency dedicated to assisting Palestinian refugees.

We are so grateful for your contributions.

In solidarity,
Alli McCracken Jarrar
Communications Director and
Board Member
Tree of Life Educational Fund



Food and Medical Supplies to Gaza



As a medical student, I have seen friends and colleagues on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have struggled to find ways to provide care to patients in need. Here in the United States, the consequences of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected our most vulnerable populations, particularly communities of color, where social injustices like overcrowding, homelessness, mass incarceration, and economic disparities make preventive measures nearly impossible.

We continue to fear what the consequences of COVID-19 will be for the people of Gaza. Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, which means that social distancing is not feasible. Reports from the World

Health Organization show that Gaza's healthcare system is unable to support widespread infection. In a population of 2 million, there are only 87 ventilators and 100 ICU beds, at most. **The Israeli blockade of Gaza has prohibited access to masks, gloves, and medications, and testing for COVID-19 is almost non-existent.** In addition, poverty and food insecurity are growing concerns, as the territory is essentially cut off from the rest of the world.

As we face the challenges of this global pandemic, we are thankful for the response of our Tree of Life community. We were pleased to raise \$20,527.75 in support of the work of Dr. Mona El Farra of Middle East Children's Alliance in Gaza, providing medical supplies, masks, cleaning products, and emergency food for those in most in need.

Thanks for being an ally for Palestine!

Sincerely,

Eliza Nguyen
Board Member
Tree of Life Educational Fund



In our journeys, we have learned the importance of the arts for the Palestinian people. The 28-foot apartheid wall has been turned into an art gallery, and their Debke dances, orchestras and ensembles express their ebullient spirit, as if to say, "We will not be silenced!"

"I raise my voice today to keep Palestine on the map, by refusing to choose silence and by condemning acts of violence and discrimination." – Tamer Al Sahouri

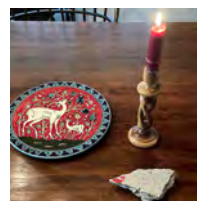
Thanks to our good friend and member of our Tree of Life Arts Council, Tamer Al Sahouri, we have seen the smiles and the pride on children's faces as they have played their instruments.



Tamer shared with us the origin of the oud. A father in grief over the tragic death of his child, created a musical instrument out of the rib cage of his child. In a place where children suffer from the cruel injustices of the Israeli occupation, music continues to offer a

non-violent way in which Palestinians can express their grief and by their music demonstrate the dignity and tenacity of their Palestinian identity.

The Palestinian Youth Orchestra has performed throughout the world where they have exemplified their determination to be free.



When the Berlin Wall was torn down in 1989, an orchestra performed Beethoven's 9th symphony ending with the "Ode to Joy." I keep a piece of that ugly wall on my bookshelf to remind me that walls can and do come down.

Thanks to the work of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, the young people of Palestine have a non-violent form of resistance against the Apartheid Wall that imprisons them.

Through your contributions of \$7,741.60 you have helped to create a fissure in that wall. May we all live and work for the day when together with our Palestinian friends we can hear Beethoven's Ode to Joy in Palestine!

David W. Good
Founder and Chair
Tree of Life Educational Fund





Messages from Palestine

A message of Peace & Friendship from Tree of Life friends in the Holy Land

Greetings from Palestine,

Last fall our family had an unforgettable journey to the United States. We were generously invited by the Tree of Life Organization to share our music, and to spread the joy of the Palestinian culture.

We really enjoyed every moment as it was a delight to visit our Tree of Life family again.

Seeing all these crowds in each venue gave us hope for a better future, believing that change can happen, peace can be achieved as long as there are people believing in our fair case, who can see the real struggle we live in each day. We invite all humans to come and experience our lives, visit our beloved Palestine, and share with us the joy of life despite all of the obstacles we have.

Thank you Tree of Life for the awareness you raise, the advocacy you make which is a massive help for Palestinians. If you are not aware of their great work, visit their website and look for their upcoming events, or make it extra special and sign up for their next journey to Palestine.

Tamer Al Sahouri, Nadine and Hani Shomali, Beit Sahour



A message from the Siraj Center, a non-profit Palestinian organization:

“Due to the pandemic, many artisans have not had any income since March! Therefore, Siraj has launched the Save Tourism Initiative. We have a new website, www.savetourism.ps, so you can buy Palestinian handicrafts, such as embroidery, handmade soap, leather-made products and olive wood carvings.

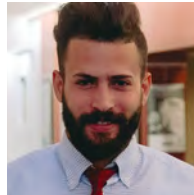
Solidarity can be expressed in many ways – advocacy, buying olive oil to support educational scholarships, compassionate relief efforts, and now we have an opportunity to support the creative spirit of Palestinians. Purchase some embroidery and know that you are strengthening the fabric of Palestinian communities. Buy some olive wood products and know that you can help our Palestinian friends as together we try to keep alive the sacred Tree of Life to which we all belong.”



“In October 2019 I was delighted to represent my country in the USA. Tree of Life invited me to be a youth ambassador during their fall series entitled; “Will there really be a morning?”

In my presentations I focused on the barriers of “Access to Healthcare for Palestinian Children.” I invite all to visit Palestine and so feel the love of God through the eyes of the Palestinian people who despite having suffered decades of occupation maintain their faith and aspire for hope.”

Rawan Suboh, Bethlehem



“I was honored to represent my country to raise awareness about the Palestinian cause.

During my trip to the USA I met some who only associated Palestine with war, not knowing that Palestine is rich with historic and archaeological sites, and has amazing

landscapes and interesting cultural activities.

I invite you to visit our beloved Palestine! Come enjoy our food and culture! Come and see with your own eyes what is happening in the Holy Land.”

Sofian Ali, Bethlehem



“In the Tree of Life Series in the fall of 2019, I had the amazing opportunity to show the American people the reality and current situation of the Palestinians who live in Hebron. That encouraged me to ask myself when the whole world will have a good morning and peace! Especially when I saw in the eyes of the audience that there are those who seek for freedom and peace for everyone. They are looking for humanity!”

Daliah Shehadeh, Hebron



Academic Scholarships

In 2007 a small Congregational church on Cape Cod wanted to hold a program on Israel/Palestine. Their new minister from Old Lyme asked for volunteers to help organize it. That was my introduction to Tree of Life and afforded me the opportunity to meet some wonderful young people and not only hear about their challenges living under Occupation in the West Bank, but also their hopes and dreams for the future. Since then I have traveled to Palestine four times and hosted many young visitors to the Cape, who shared their experiences, culture and music at our programs.

Palestinian families have the same aspirations as parents and children in the United States and as their Jewish Israeli neighbors. They value education, want to go to college, get jobs to support themselves and contribute to the economic progress of their country. For Palestinians, pursuing an education may require negotiating checkpoints on their trip from home to school or internship and being subjected to the indecencies inherent in that process, or especially in Hebron being harassed by violent Jewish settlers while walking to school. In 2015 Tree of Life hosted two young women who had persevered and were graduating from Bethlehem University to pursue careers in medical fields. They viewed education as an effective, non-violent means of resisting the Israeli occupation; as an essential way to magnify their roles in their communities and to advocate for Palestinian women; and as a means to empower Palestinians in shaping a peaceful future that protects their culture and values.



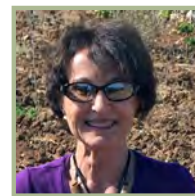
*Mona Abu-Jusef
Student in Gaza*

These dedicated young women were recipients of Tree of Life college scholarships. Almost 10 years ago the Tree of Life board made a commitment to fund tuition at a 4-year Palestinian college for select young women and men, through graduation. Over the years most have attended Bethlehem University with a few going to Al Quds or Birzeit. Unlike the high tuitions in the U.S., one semester has ranged from \$700-\$950.

Two years ago we decided that rather than choose college scholarship recipients ourselves we would provide annual scholarship support for the established programs of Middle East Children’s Alliance for Gaza youth and Al Rowwad for youth in the West Bank. Additionally, Tree of Life has had a long-standing relationship with the Greek Orthodox Shepherd’s School (K-12) in Beit Sahour, and we now provide financial assistance to those families. **This year, thanks to the generosity of our Tree of Life supporters, we have given \$7000 for students in Gaza, \$7000 for West Bank students selected by Al Rowwad and \$5000 for students at Shepherd’s School in Beit Sahour.**

As Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” We hope that through support of our scholarship program you will help Tree of Life create a better world for the youth of Palestine.

Elaine F. Brouillard
Treasurer
Tree of Life Educational Fund



Tree of Life Journey!

We are hoping that our next journey, post pandemic, will be either in late December/early January of this year, March of 2021 or June of 2021. Please check our website and future e-messages for updates and let us know if you’re interested!

Silence Is Not An Option

Amidst our daily pandemic existence, freedom and liberation rise to challenge the ragged layers of our nation’s structural inequality and state-sanctioned violence. Alongside trembling social fault zones, the reverberating cry of Black Lives Matter and No Justice No Peace strike at the heart of the entrenched structural status quo born of colonialism, slavery and white supremacy. BLM’s moral might fracture the static discourse that imprisons, impoverishes, and oppresses.

However, BLM’s goals remain mostly unfulfilled. Will this American intifada fade as did the Arab Spring? Or will this collision of values give way to greater freedom, justice, and equality for all? Let’s work for the latter because, in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, “No One is Free Until Everyone is Free.” Progress never happens without effort. It’s up to each of us.

Our present-day polity does not afford neutrality. That old labor union clarion-call “Which Side Are You On,” made famous by folksinger Pete Seeger, requires a response. Marching, displaying yard signs, and engaging in progressive social media is not enough. We must also demand more of our political representatives and replace those whose actions are inconsistent with freedom and justice for all. There is much to be done on many fronts. From Ferguson to our Southern border to Minneapolis to Palestine, the cry for freedom connects these struggles.

TOLEF joins with numerous allies to press congresspersons to co-sponsor **H.R. 2407** (End U.S. Funding for Israel’s Detention of Palestinian Children) and **H.R. 8050** (To prohibit U.S. Government recognition of the Israeli Government’s claim of sovereignty over the West Bank). The Congressional switchboard number is 202-224-3121. Call and ask to be connected to your Congressperson’s office. Tell your Congressperson to co-sponsor **H.R. 2407 and H.R. 8050**.



John Fussell
Advocacy Coordinator and Vice President
Tree of Life Educational Fund



Isabel Wilkerson’s latest work, *Caste – The Origins of Our Discontent*, speaks to the “The Evil of silence.” She quotes dissident theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who perished behind the walls of a Nazi concentration camp. His words ring ever true today: *“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”*



Amplifying voices of conscience for social justice

Mission

The Tree of Life Educational Fund, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, was established by The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme to provide cross-cultural and transnational travel experiences, interfaith conferences, and educational opportunities to help participants become more enlightened and engaged in making this a more just and peaceful world.

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Contact

Tree of Life Educational Fund, Inc.
P.O. Box 968
Old Lyme, CT 06371
Telephone: 860 434 8686
Email: tolef@tolef.org
Website: tolef.org