

## Issam Juha



When one explores the preservation of built-up cultural heritage in Bethlehem Governorate, Issam Juha emerges as a key figure who has made a significant contribution during his more than 15 years of work in this field. Architect Issam Juha, who was born in Bethlehem in 1977, studied at the Frères School and graduated from Birzeit University in 1999 with a BSc in architecture. Witnessing the important project of Bethlehem 2000 and its impact on the rehabilitation and revitalization of the three historic towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour, Issam decided to complete his studies in the field of cultural heritage, and in 2004 he earned an MA in world heritage studies from Brandenburg University of Technology, Germany. His master's thesis tackled the issue of inscribing Bethlehem on the World Heritage List – a dream that he pursued and helped bring to reality through his work in preparing the first Palestinian nomination dossier to inscribe Bethlehem on the World Heritage List, which was achieved in June 2012.

In January 2004, Issam started his career as a conservation architect at the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP). In February 2008, at the age of 31, the board of trustees headed by the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities entrusted Issam with the role of director of CCHP. This decision was the result of his proven skills and leadership capabilities. The center has flourished, doubling its staff from 10 to 20 employees and extending its mandate to cover the whole West Bank. Issam has played a major role in fundraising and has secured more than US\$ 15 million to be invested in protecting cultural heritage resources in Palestine and utilizing these resources as a tool for socio-economic development, enabling CCHP to rehabilitate more than 80 historic buildings and 20 historic neighborhoods. Issam has taken part in the academic field as well through offering courses on cultural heritage and tourism for the BA and MA students at Bethlehem University.

This success was a main reason for nominating Issam as a candidate for the Bethlehem municipal elections of 2012. At the age of 35, Issam became the deputy mayor of Bethlehem. During his mandate, he contributed to the remarkable achievements of the Bethlehem Municipality in the field of development projects, but more importantly, he was a key person in the preparation and endorsement of the first bylaws in Palestine for the protection of the historic center and traditional buildings in Bethlehem. These bylaws were endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Local Government, and have been a pioneering example that has encouraged the municipalities of Ramallah and Beit Jala to contract

CCHP to implement similar projects and prepare bylaws for their historic centers and traditional buildings.

Earlier this year, Issam represented CCHP at the ICCROM-ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre in Sharjah, where he received the Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation in the Arab Region. The biennial award was designed to honor and reward remarkable works that contribute to the protection and vitality of tangible cultural heritage in the Arab world.

Issam remains active as an architect and is keen to continue contributing to the national efforts for the preservation of cultural heritage resources in Palestine.

