

# Back to the Roots

## Welcome to the Bethlehem District Diaspora Convention



By Vera Baboun, Mayor of Bethlehem



he rhythm that embraces the skies and resonates beyond the boundaries of space tells our tale. Within this rhythm resonates the history of pioneers who have built and constructed nations, the tale of generations who have kept the legacy of their ancestors, and the story of the land upon which heavenly grace has bestowed the task of carrying divine messages for people who have in the past, still do now, and will always, wherever they are, perceive this rhyme as the source of survival and existence. It is the melody of the homeland, Palestine! And its people are delighted to welcome back their long awaited sons from the diaspora.

The conference “Back to the Roots” is a return to the cradle – to land, identity, and nation. The waves of migration from Palestine, particularly from Bethlehem, have led to the disappearance of entire families who left to begin a new life in the diaspora, with all its challenges and difficulties, at times facing the impossible. But Palestinians have overcome the impossible, and they have attained the unattainable. As the mayor of Bethlehem, I have had the honor to meet with some of them during the last few years – those whose laudable endeavors have led them to high-ranking posts in their second home.

In spite of the long years of exile and successive generations of expatriates, these people have not forgotten the tongue of their home and origin. Youth who have never set foot on their ancestral soil talk about their roots, they call to mind their dreams of the past and ambitions for the future and probe their identity and heritage. Re-member. This term frames the recollecting of memories as the equivalent of collecting the fragmented members, putting them back together, reconstructing the deconstructed. And what higher merit is there than to make such a feat reality? This conference wishes to establish associations that re-bind Palestinians, allow them to share their support, and let them be and remain connected. As an anticipated aftermath, the legacy of this conference will certainly be a bridge between our people. By opening a space for investment in many fields and cooperation between communities in the homeland and the diaspora, this conference wishes to serve as a catalyst that provokes in our brothers and sisters of the diaspora the desire to return and bring to life their hometown Bethlehem.

By hosting this conference, Bethlehem is most happy to experience this historic moment, the “Bethlehemite Moment.” Emanating from the Birthplace of the Nativity, the city of peace, love, and hope, let us witness our reunion, remain as we always have been: hand in hand. United, we attain the unfeasible; together, we are always stronger.

