

Simon Ibrahim Awad



As a young boy, Simon Awad spent his days outside, observing the natural environment. One day, he was hunting with friends and took interest in a bird's nest in a nearby olive tree. The boys reached for the birds and discovered a snake attempting to ingest one of the chicks. The power of the natural environment amazed young Simon. He continued to explore, fostering a connection with the land. This connection would lead him to a life of environmental advocacy that has enabled thousands of others to discover a similar connection to their natural environment.

For the last two decades, Simon has served as the executive director of the Environmental Education Center (EEC/ELCJHL). He holds a bachelor's degree in science, though much of his passion comes from life experience. At 18, Simon was already involved in community service. During his volunteer work, he was impressed by an old couple picking olives and singing traditional songs. Sixteen years later, he launched the first Annual Olive Harvest Festival. For Simon, the festival is an extension of the joy that radiated from the couple. He values the



importance of community in creating environmental change.

Simon began his career at the Palestinian Human Rights Information Center where he documented house demolitions and the uprooting of trees. He recognized the importance of environmental protection, not only from occupation violations but also from societal practices. Years later, he started the Palestinian Conference for Awareness and Environmental Education which encourages continuous research and planning for environmental conservation. The 10th edition will be held in the fall of this year.

Simon still possesses his sense of wonder and finds new inspiration for change each day. He developed the EEC's botanical garden and continues to explore capacity-building opportunities for the center. EEC has carried out initiatives that focus on tree planting (A Tree for Every Student), Nature's Classroom, green schools, Palestinian identity, eco-justice, and peace building.

Simon was the first Arab researcher to receive the international bird classification license. He launched

bird-monitoring and ringing stations in Beit Jala and Jericho, the first of their kinds in the Arab world. He co-authored *The Checklist of the Birds of Palestine*, which has been adopted as an official reference. He also authored *Birds of Palestine* and has contributed to several scientific papers and articles in international books and journals. He is a member of several national and international organizations and was recently appointed chairman of the Palestine National Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). He has been honored by several institutions, including receiving the Saudi Arabia Award for Environmental Management in the Islamic World.

Simon dreams of a green Palestine and works hard each day to find sustainable solutions to change the attitude and behavior of society toward the environment. He is supported by his wife and three children, all of whom work in arenas that focus on the betterment of society. In all aspects of his life, Simon continues to proceed vigilantly toward his goals.

