

A Test of Humanity from Palestine

By Yara Salem



The current, unprecedented, challenging times that people all over the globe are facing require ingenious solutions, new perspectives, and earnest introspection to help us deal with a new world and counter what is dictated by a few. Where do we Palestinians stand, and what can we offer the world when we are at our very breaking point? Our bodies, psyches, and spirits all serve as a living example of how humanity's limits and potential are being tested in an age in which human values tend to take a back seat to oppression, greed, and destruction. How can one be human without empathizing with Palestinians – not able to recognize injustice and suffering? Being human necessitates being able to relate to the brutal uprooting of Palestinians and comprehending human rights values. And this includes expressing solidarity with the oppressed as a means of defense against violations to preserve the last traces of human dignity. We Palestinians offer the world its most valuable asset: humanity!

To augment this gift, we at Taawon work relentlessly to help reinforce Palestinian steadfastness, hoping that one day Palestinians may become full-fledged citizens of a country that enjoys independence, freedom, sovereignty, dignity, and prosperity. We envision a Palestine where citizens are empowered to reach their full human potential with excellence and creativity. A Palestine where citizens can reinvent life not only through their survival but also through their narrative, art, culture, and history. A Palestine where citizens not only stand in solidarity with other oppressed and marginalized communities across the world but also provide living examples of rising up against injustice and oppression everywhere.

As the leading civil society organization in Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora camps in Lebanon, Taawon has, during the past 37 years, anchored its interventions solidly in developing the capabilities of individuals and institutions while preserving Palestinian heritage and identity. It has supported Palestinian living culture by systematically defining Palestinian needs and priorities and actively identifying proper mechanisms to maximize the use of available resources.

In its attempt to demonstrate what it truly means to be Palestinian, Taawon has spearheaded all efforts to empower Palestinians socially and economically, striving to strengthen their sense of identity and universal significance, role, and relevance. Through its work, Taawon has highlighted Palestine's uniqueness and released the creative energies of youth, women, and children. Through the wealth of its opportunities, numerous segments of Palestinian society have managed to unleash their capabilities and creativity and give back even while living under the most difficult circumstances.

In order to preserve Palestinian identity, the emphasis was placed on generating infinite resilience by employing various tools and interventions. All these aim to deepen the connection to our heritage and land and to define and carry out our role in the world. At the same time,

Palestine's gift to the world: humanity, resilience, and steadfastness in the face of all forces of darkness.

To this end, the design of our interventions has aimed at sustainable economic and social development in close alignment with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, in partnership with all stakeholders, we have made efforts to mobilize resources towards outcome-driven projects that target education, culture, health, agriculture, enterprise-development, the care of orphans, the economic



The rehabilitation of Ammim Land, Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program.



Solar energy panels for four hospitals and health centers in the Gaza Strip.

we strive to offer a glimmer of hope to our youth, women, and civil society actors, allowing them to flourish and build as well as advance and maintain their humanity and dignity.

empowerment of youth and women, and humanitarian and emergency aid. These interventions ensure relevance for international development by

employing top-notch operating standards. They have categorized Taawon's work and helped to universally recognize its programming and institutional performance. In turn, our work has helped attract donors around the world who continue to support the needs of the Palestinians creatively, efficiently, and transparently. This recognition has manifested itself also in gaining many

as the cornerstone of a flourishing Palestinian society. To further preserve Palestine's identity and cultural heritage, which are the foundations for survival and sustainability, Taawon, through its museum, culture, and renovation programs of old cities, has worked on enriching the human experience by reinforcing connections to previous generations of Palestinian

The Palestinian reality is complex as we live tragedies that are woven into the fabric of our lives and society and that have become our identifiers. We realize that the task before us is twofold: The first focuses on active and constructive participation in building resilience foundations while attentively observing the poverty and marginalization realities of those whose land has been confiscated,

whose homes have been demolished, whose trees have been uprooted, and ultimately, whose lives have been stolen. Those who face fear, brutality, and impunity and buy life with their very lives. We only have one choice, which is to be part and parcel of the move to build a sustainable and inclusive Palestinian society that can offer hope not only to the next generations of Palestinians but also to future generations across the world.

Our second task focuses on participation in formulating the image of a vulnerable and threatened society whose image is constantly misrepresented and whose identity distorted in an age of rising global racial and ethnic biases. Through investing in Palestine's human capital and social empowerment, there is no doubt that negative stereotypes can be countered, and a new perception of humanity can be created where the values of justice, solidarity, and freedom will prevail.

Although we at Taawon contribute to this daunting task, we are conscious that it is only achievable if it is nurtured within a clear vision of the realization of the Palestine project. The continuous Palestinian tragedy

poses the single biggest ethical challenge to our humanity. Yes, we are giving to humanity and will keep giving. Surrendering is not an option. We are broken into pieces, but we will collect ourselves and stand tall in our humanity, recognizing that it is vibrant and alive. Palestinians are taking care of it all.

Director General of Taawon, Yara Salem, is a well-known global development expert with more than 23 years of high-level international experience. Yara has led development works in many countries and sectors and with clients from government, the private sector, civil society, and the diplomatic and donor communities. She has worked for the World Bank Group, IFC, and UN, with a focus on Africa (Zambia, Tanzania, Sudan, Somalia), Latin America (Caribbean Islands), East and South Asia (Nepal, Singapore, ASEAN), Eastern and Central Europe (Serbia, Kosovo), and the Middle East and North Africa (GCC, Mashreq). Previously, Yara worked for the Palestinian government and also in the Palestinian private sector. Prior to joining Taawon, she acted as the World Bank Special Country Representative to Iraq. She was born in Nablus and holds a master's degree in international commerce and trade from Middlebury Institute of International Studies, United States; a master's degree in international relations from Birzeit University; and a bachelor's degree in business administration and sociology from the University of Jordan.



Bridge Palestine, a national initiative to empower outstanding Palestinian students to enroll in prominent international universities.



Development and rehabilitation of safe playgrounds for kindergartens by the Education Program in Gaza.

internationally acclaimed awards, helping to catapult Palestine to the forefront of international excellence.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the building of solid and effective partnerships with more than 200 partner institutions, foundations, funds, and societies in the field of international development.

When it comes to programming on the ground, Taawon maintains a focus on all enablers of community resilience. Substantial investments were made in inclusive and equitable quality education to improve economic prospects, encourage societal cohesion, and foster Palestinian national identity. Well-educated Palestinians serve

narratives, discourse, literature, music, dance, theater, and visual art, as well as connecting the Palestinian experience to the world. Other community development programs that have centered on supporting economic activities and building resilience at the grassroots level have provided for the basic needs of Palestinian communities by laying the foundations for living dignified lives with the promise of a more equitable and just future. Such programs support health, agriculture, youth and women's job generation, small businesses, orphans, and relief efforts while enhancing the capacity of civil society organizations, supporting their critical role in sustaining and enhancing Palestinian livelihoods.