

United Nations Development Programme

Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People

برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي / برنامج مساعدة الشعب الفلسطيني



PRESS RELEASE

Ramallah Experiences a Cultural Renaissance

For the past 4 years of Palestinian uprising, the city of Ramallah, like most areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, has experienced hardship and cultural depression as a result of political crisis.

Yet things have changed dramatically this month. The city has undergone an unprecedented surge of cultural activity following the completion of the Ramallah Cultural Palace. The state-of-art facility, which was financed by the Government of Japan in the amount of \$5.5 million and constructed by the UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) in coordination with Municipality of Ramallah and the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, has profoundly re-invigorated the cultural scene in the city.

The official inauguration of Palace was on 5 July under the auspices of President Yasser Arafat, who laid the cornerstone for the building 4 years ago.

For the Japanese government the centre is flagship project that highlights its commitment to the Palestinian people. "The importance of such a cultural centre stems from the need to preserve the very rich Palestinian cultural heritage," said Izuru Shimmura, Head of the Japanese diplomatic mission to Palestine. "We hope that the new centre will create a venue for cultural exchange among Palestinian people as well as with other cultures throughout the world" he added.

The Japanese government is not only one of UNDP/PAPP' strongest partners, but is also the leading contributor to alleviating the hardships faced by Palestinians.

The Palace is the first and only cultural centre of its kind in the Palestinian territories or, in fact, in the region. The building contains advanced facilities including a 720-seat auditorium, conference rooms, several exhibition halls designed to handle anything from intimate poetry recitals, to film premieres and large scale musical events.

Yet, the inauguration of the Palace is not the only reason behind this cultural renaissance.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of PAPP, a programme that has left an indelible mark in the development of the Palestinian people.

Officials of the programme thought it would be very fitting to assert the centrality of culture to development by marking the programme's 25th anniversary with a month-long cultural programme. "Culture cuts to the core of development" said Timothy Rothermel, the Special Representative of the UNDP in Jerusalem.

For Rothermel "people can be deprived of their incomes, their education and their crops, but it is hard to take away someone's appreciation for music and the arts. And in a place like Palestine, where identity is threatened, preserving the past and also adapting it and to sharing Palestinian traditions is very important."



While preserving the past is central, the culture night held by UNDP on July 8 was all about the future. The night included a key-note address by Dr. Nabeel Sha'ath, the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who expressed his appreciation for the impressive feat of engineering evident in the construction of the Palace and paid tribute to the UNDP as a birth child of the UN that has been very valuable to the Palestinians. "This centre is about hope and light in times of destruction and despair" Shaath said. "This Cultural Palace is very fitting to a people who are suffering and struggling to attain a state of their own... it is a step in that journey for an independent Palestinian state...it will happen, we can feel it," Sha'ath added.

A sense of hope and light was clearly visible on the audience who packed the theatre on Wednesday, 7 July, as the 40-member student orchestra of the National Conservatory of Music enchanted the crowd with performances of classical western music. To his passing days, the renowned Palestinian-American intellectual, Edward Said promoted the Conservatory as a one the "noblest causes to support." Said, along with prominent Israeli musician, Daniel Barenboim, organized joint musical workshops between Palestinian and Israeli children, using music as tool for cultural exchange and understanding.

If the audience were enchanted by the Conservatory's performance, they were elated by the dance performance of a group of young Palestinians called Baraem El-Fonoun, who derive their acts from the rich Palestinian cultural heritage.

The month not only celebrates Palestinian culture and heritage, but opens Ramallah's doors to the rest of the world. Last week, the first Ramallah International Film Festival opened with scores of artists, film makers and journalists arriving in the city. With a pledge by the internationally esteemed actor, Omar Al-Sherif, and with film institutions from around the world pledging to support Palestinian filmmakers and script writers with training and capacity building, the festival is already creating waves in the territories.

In addition, the UNDP has scheduled two major performances for the month of July. Simon Shaheen, the critically acclaimed Palestinian musician who resides in New York, will perform on Wednesday, 23 July and Radio Tarifa, a prominent band from Andalusia (Spain), whose music is a fusion of Andalusian, Arabic and Sephardic tones, will perform on Sunday, 25 July.

For further information, please contact:

In Jerusalem: Ehab Shanti, Communications Officer, Tel. +972-2-6268228/052-269610 - ehab.shanti@undp.org; or Dania Darwish, Tel. +972-2-626-8290/054-393156 - dania.darwish@undp.org - For more information on UNDP/PAPP see <http://www.papp.undp.org>.