



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2014**



ASHTAR THEATRE

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ASHTAR THEATRE

ASHTAR for Theatre Productions & Training is a non-governmental theatre organization. ASHTAR Theatre was founded in 1991 by two Palestinian actors, Edward Muallem and Iman Aoun, who worked in the Palestinian theatre since 1977.

ASHTAR began its work in Jerusalem as the first drama training program in Palestine targeting children and youth. The institution soon became a dynamic theatre with a local flavor and international orientation, whose objective is to spread creativity and commitment to change through a unique mix of training and acting programs and professional theatre performances.



ASHTAR Theatre works in three main streams (below) and tries to reach the Palestinian audience in all its localities in East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. “If a marginalized audience is unable to come to our theatre in Ramallah, we take our stage and play to the audience.”

ASHTAR Theatre specializes in the technique of the Interactive-Forum Theatre, which aims to spread effective dialogue and a commitment to change within society. This theatre form pushes the audience to interact with the actors on stage about important social and political issues, transforming the audience from the character of receiver to a role as participator. Using the Forum Theatre methodology, ASHTAR Theatre stands as a lively agent of change in Palestine, brings theatre to all segments of Palestinian society, and engages communities in democratic dialogue on daily issues they face and social taboos. The program creates a platform for social and cultural change, and gives a voice to the voiceless through its focus on underrepresented groups such as women and youth.

ASHTAR Theatre annually produces joint international theatrical production with theatres and theatre professionals from different countries, presenting new and varied theatre forms in Palestine to enhance the professional development of the actors and the general audience of Palestinian theatre.

ASHTAR Theatre conducts intensive training programs for youth aged 12 – 22, all year round, from which many theatrical performances result. These programs offer youth essential skills that reach beyond acting and contribute to raising their level of self-awareness, enhancing their self-confidence and giving them leadership skills and dynamic ways of communicating and working in a group.

ASHTAR Theatre has won many international theatre awards, toured worldwide, and presented its works in numerous international theatre festivals.

ASHTAR FOR THEATRE PRODUCTIONS AND TRAINING

ENHANCING CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE

VISION

“ASHTAR for Theatre Productions and Training, looks towards a creative and developed Palestinian society that embraces theatre as an essential engine of culture and development.”

MISSION

“At Ashtar, we aim for theatre to be a tool for change to serve cultural and social development, and to promote and deepen the creativity of Palestinian theatre.”

CORE VALUES

Ashtar’s core values shape its approach to all services and activities, and act as a reference point for its staff and beneficiaries, and. Those are:

- Freedom of creativity and expression as a universal right
- The value of theatre both as a form of art and as a tool for social change
- Truth, honesty and trustworthiness
- Pursuit of a unique artistic identity

The internal code of conduct emphasizes:

- Teamwork
- Equality
- Communication and exchange
- Mutual respect
- Encouragement and support

TARGET GROUPS

- Youth and Women
- Marginalized social groups
- Palestinian Theatre Community
- Palestinian general public
- International audiences

Executive Summary

ASHTAR Theatre has been able to achieve its 2014 plan efficiently and effectively. The Forum play «Al Mirya'a Wal Qirqa'a» was produced and performed several times in Ramallah. The play highlights three main topics: the lack of marketing for the Palestinian agricultural products and the competition with the Israeli produce, the water shortage and its control by the Israeli occupation, and challenges and the land confiscation by the Israeli occupation and its consequences on the Palestinians in area «C».

The second International Youth Theatre Festival was held in the summer and has presented 5 performances and reached a total of 303 audience members which were from youth and adults. The participants in the Festival were 45 and came from Palestine, Norway, Germany, U.K., and Egypt.

ASHTAR Theatre produced the professional play “Sinbad and the Monster”, which targets school students and tackles the issue of environmental pollution which was caused by mankind, its effects on earth, and the different ways to avoid it through recycling; it is a play which encourages children to interact with the actors in order to provoke their thinking to give suggestions on how to avoid pollution and keep earth clean.

Also with the professional theatre the play «48 Minutes for Palestine» produced in 2010, which is a compelling drama without words, and explores the relationship between a man and a woman who do not co-exist on an equal basis. The play toured in Europe reaching Norway and the U.K.

A co-production with the British theatre group Border Crossings, of the professional play “The Iliad”, was reproduced entitled “This Flesh is Mine”, and is set in Ancient times and the contemporary Middle East. This new play, features six actors from Palestine and the UK. “This Flesh is Mine” was presented in English in Ramallah and London in May of this year.

During the month of August ASHTAR theatre produced the play “Ramallah Bubble Lounge”. It is a comedy written by six young actors under the direction and the supervision of Bayan Shibib. The play’s name reflects the actors and the director’s view of the city and its inhabitants who started to transform into an isolated creatures living in a bubble away from what’s happening in their country. In the light of a comedic and socio-political atmosphere the play’s characters reflect different social and political classes and groups of people within the Palestinian community, by moving from one table to another, channling their parents, their friends, people from their communities, people who they see hanging around in coffee shops talking about politics and the country. Not trying to answer any question, only raising big question marks about identity, resistance, art and do we really live in a bubble?



Within the Drama Training Program ASHTAR embarked on expanding its target area besides Ramallah and Gaza to reach more youth in the West Bank. Consequently four groups are currently trained on drama, which is a three-year program reaching youth from Gaza, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Jericho. The 4 groups involve 120 boys and girls who through drama acquire increased life skills in the area of self-expression and solving their problems, leadership, interpersonal skills, and increased cultural awareness through drama performances.

In the summer of 2014, and in the shadow of the Israeli inhuman attacks on Gaza Strip in 2014, ASHTAR Theater decided to reproduce «The Gaza Monologues» which has been performed and reproduced since 2010 in different places by different theaters around the world, but this time it reproduced it with six of ASHTAR Theatre's second and third year students and graduates, and directed by Bayan Shbib.

ASHTAR Theatre youth group were invited by Kinder Kultur Karawane – Germany for a 40 day tour with “The Gaza Monologues”, the play was performed in different cities in Germany and Austria, with more than 21 performances, and it targeted different audiences from school students, university students and public audiences in general.

Under the Drama Training Program Commissioned by the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR) for training, a group of 16 intellectually disabled youth and 4 teachers from a number of specialized participating schools, on Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and produced a forum play «The Forgotten File» with them. That raises the rights of the disabled children especially their right for educational integration. The team produced a play which was presented 4 times reaching general audience and decision makers from the relevant ministries.

ASHTAR Activities in 2014

First: Theatre of the Oppressed Program

☒ The Forum play «Al Mirya'a Wal Qurqa'a»

A forum play that tackles the challenges of the agricultural sector; the play undertook a series of intensive research and field study to examine in depth the reasons and challenges of the Agricultural life in Palestine especially in the Jordan Valley. The research included meetings with several officials and organizations with the purpose of understanding the various issues that the Jordan Valley faces, especially as it relates to the agricultural sector.

The play is delving deeply into a social, economical and political discourse to reveal the real challenges and obstacles the farmers in the West Bank face. The play highlights three main topics: the lack of marketing for the Palestinian agricultural products and the competition with the Israeli produce, the water shortage and its control by the Israeli occupation, and challenges and the land confiscation by the Israeli occupation and its consequences on the Palestinians in area «C».

During the performances discussion sessions with the audience were held and the presented topics were discussed. Several of the audiences took the stage in an effort to suggest solutions to the problems at hand.

The play was performed 7 times in Ramallah targeting people from relevant GOs and NGOs, as well as general audience and university students. During 2015, it will be performed 18 times. This production was the outcome of a strategic cooperation and support of Rosa Luxembourg Foundation.



Second: Professional Theatre Program

α “Sinbad and the Monster”

In February 2014, ASHTAR embarked on the production of the professional play «Sinbad and the Monster». The play targets school students and tackles the issue of environmental pollution which was caused by mankind, its effects on earth, and the different ways to avoid it through recycling; it is a play which encourages children to interact with the actors in order to provoke their thinking to give suggestions on how to avoid pollution and keep earth clean.



The play toured in the Emirates during the month of March and reached several cities. Seven performances were presented as part of the Abu Dhabi Festival. The team also held nine theatre workshops with children with special needs.



During the second part of the year and with the support of Paltel Group Foundation the play was reproduced. The play was presented 8 times to UNRWA and private school students in Ramallah with the support of the EU and Sida – Swedish International Development Agency. The students who attended the play were very enthusiastic during the discussions and talked about ways in which they can protect the environment be it at their schools, homes, and in the streets.



☒ "This Flesh is Mine"

New co-production with Border Crossings-UK

Continuing our traditions of joint productions with international theatre companies, ASHTAR has partnered with Border Crossings, the British theatre group, and with the support of Anna Lindh and the British Council for the production which retells "The Iliad", entitled "This Flesh is Mine", and is set in Ancient times and the contemporary Middle East. «This Flesh Is Mine» brings together Homer's Troy and the contemporary life and politics of the Middle East. Themes of war, death, grief, honour and (a lack of) reconciliation resonate thunderously. This play, was written by Brian Woolland, features six actors from Palestine and the UK. "This Flesh is Mine" was presented in English in Ramallah and London in May of this year.



☒ "48 Minutes for Palestine" - in Norway and London

Early in 2014, ASHTAR Theatre toured the play «48 Minutes for Palestine» (2010) which is a compelling drama without dialogue that explores the relationship between a man and a woman who do not co-exist on an equal basis. It explores inequality in gender relations and is an attempt to talk about historical events and contemporary issues, through images and without words. The play toured in Europe, reaching Norway and the UK. The Municipality of Trondheim invited us and coordinated the tour in Ramallah's twin city. The play was performed seven times for high school students and public audiences and was highly appreciated by its audience. In the UK, the play was presented to 300 students and teachers from Rose Bruford College in London, and was a great success.



Third: Drama Training Program

✕ First, Second and Third year Drama clubs.

The Drama Training Program, which reaches 120 youths, continued its activities in the training of students in Gaza, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Ramallah. Two productions were presented during the first quarter of 2014. In Ramallah, 17 students from the second year drama training program worked on the play "Alice... Where have you been?". The play is an adaptation by ASHTAR Theatre of Lewis Carroll's masterpiece "Alice in Wonderland."

"Alice... Where have you been?" which was directed by Emile Saba and Rana Burqan is a performance full of music, dance, funny jokes and puzzling characters. The play was performed 10 times reaching UNRWA, public and private schools in Ramallah.

The play was performed twice in «Nuwar Nisan Festival» which is organized by Ramallah Municipality and reaches deaf-mute children and other audiences.

The 3rd year students of Gaza presented the play «Sons of Hercules» three times in Gaza as part of their graduation project. The themes of "Sons of Hercules" reflect the cause of the Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their homes and displaced in different parts of the world.



Within the Drama Training Program for youth, a sports theatre competition was held as the last event during this year. The competition was between the three groups of the 1st year students from Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Jericho (54 young boys and girls) and was held in Jericho. The competition was attended by students from three schools in Jericho in addition to parents of some students from Jerusalem. This project is implemented in partnership with UNICEF. This program will continue with these students in Ramallah in 2015 and will also enroll a new group for the first year.

This program guarantees the possibility of its graduates to apply for the international theatre schools and provides them with self-confidence, ignites their latent talents, and deepens their capabilities and communication skills.



α Second International Youth Theatre Festival

ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival - 2nd edition (ATiYF) is a result of the success of its 1st edition in 2012. This biannual festival is a continuation of the achievement of “The Gaza Mono-Logues” project and its global contacts and ongoing accomplishments. It is also the graduation project of ASHTAR Theatre’s third year students in Ramallah; designed and run by the youth for the youth, in the form of a Camp-Fest. It contained master classes and presented local and international performances to the Palestinian audience. ATiYF brought international and local youth theatre students over a period of 10 days in the summer, and they have worked, performed, exchanged cultural and artistic skills, and experiences. Throughout the 10 days; 5 workshops in Movement lead by Anna Konjetzky from Germany, Political Theatre lead by Iona Paun - Romania, Theatre of the Oppressed lead by Mohammad Eid from ASHTAR Theatre, Scenography workshop lead by Omar Elmoutaz Bel-lah from Egypt, and Comedia Dell’arte lead by Roar Sorli from Norway. The workshops were attended by 45 International and local theatre students.



ATiYF presented 5 performances and reached a total of 303 audience members which were from youth and adults. The performances were as follows:

1. The Gaza Mono-Logues: Gaza Monologues is a theatre performance by four young theatre actors from ASHTAR Theatre. The piece presents 8 monologues written by ASHTAR Theatre. Students from Gaza about their experience during the Gaza War in 2008 - 2009. The Mono-Logues were first performed on the 17th of October 2010 involving 1500 young theatre students from 36 countries from around the world. The Mono-Logues are still being performed locally and internationally.

2. The play “Game on”- Tromso:

It is a play that focuses on youth relations to video games. The play was performed by the youth group from Tromso. It is based on the students’ stories and testimonies.. In addition the Tromso group performed to some of The Gaza Monologues.



3. Abdrücke folge - Germany: A two dance installations for one dancer. Two faces to one image (Positive and Negative). A dancer looking for traces of her own existence - which is constantly blurred. The body is the mooring rope to the self, a matter that can be measured, drawn, touched described and displayed. There are no longer any partitions between spectator and protagonist; the audience surrounds the stage on all four sides - barely separated by light. Behind the audience on all four sides - there are screens that not only show live images of the dancer, but also images of the outside.

4. Boesman and Lena - Palestine: is a classic play by playwright Athol Fugard from the period leading to the fall of the Apartheid state. In 2012 Athol Fugard received Broadway's prestigious Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement Boesman and Lena by Fugard gives a glimpse into the life of a couple under South African Apartheid, a time when the white minority controlled most of the land. We meet Boesman and Lena as they set up camp in a desolated place and are finally confronted with the absurd nature of a life wandering from shanty town to shanty town, in a world where communities are shattered. They are forced to turn their disorientation, loss of dignity and sense of isolation on one another.

5. Now has Passed: This performance is the culmination of the combined efforts of all the national and international trainers and participants in the ATiYF 2014 Camp-Fest. Where we examined "Now" and emphasized on living the moment to its fullest with all its fortunate and unfortunate events and outcomes; we also explored the meaning of looking back at the past and looking forward into the future, in order to value and understand our present. We tried to strengthen the theme of being proactive so we can make a difference today and tomorrow. We looked at the moment through our physical body and its artistic reflection for the embodiment of time and thought. Not only will the performance examine "Time" but it will also inspects the performing space as another dimension.

This Festival was implemented in partnership with the EU and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).



⌘ “The Gaza Monologues” touring in Germany and Austria

In autumn 2014, In the shadow of the Israeli inhuman attacks on Gaza Strip in 2014, ASHTAR Theater decided to reproduce «The Gaza Monologues» which has been performed and reproduced since 2010 in different places by different Theaters around the world, but this time it reproduced it with six of ASHTAR Theatre’s second and third year students and graduates: Sasha Asbah, Walid Hantouli, Dalia Said, Aseel Saba and Dara Rafidi from Ramallah, and Tamer Nijim from Gaza; and directed by Bayan Shbib.

ASHTAR Theatre youth group were invited by Kinder Kultur Karawane – Germany for a 40 day tour with “The Gaza Monologues”, the play was performed in 15 different cities in Germany and Vienna, with more than 21 performances, and it targeted different audiences from school students, university students and public audiences in general. The play had a very good reception by the audiences and the press.



⌘ Theatre training with intellectually disabled students

Commissioned by the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR), Edward Muallem and Munira Zureiqi, started training a group of 16 intellectually disabled youth and 4 teachers from a number of specialized participating schools, on Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and produced a forum play with them that raises the rights of the disabled children especially their right for educational integration.



The play “Forgotten File” is based on real life stories, and tells the bells for us in order to question ourselves... whether we are capable of meeting the minimal needs of this target group and preserve their dignity?

The play “Forgotten File” opens a file in order to open a continuous constructive dialogue between the Palestinian Authority organizations and the civil society organizations to work towards meeting some of the demands of the persons with mental disabilities.

ASHTAR In Gaza

Critical Debate and situation analysis through psycho-social intervention in Gaza

Based on what Gaza Strip had faced over a month of continuous attack and brutal killing mostly of children and women and the massive destruction of homes and lives of people, ASHTAR Theatre in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Foundation worked to help youth regain a psychological balance as well as with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

ASHTAR Team in Gaza worked with a group of ASHTAR Graduates in and 10 youth were trained for a week for a total of 25 hours to utilize the training they were given during a period of 3 years, in order to work with children and youth to help the people re-adjust after the devastating traumatic situation they have found themselves in, and to evoke a voice and a clear mind about their future.

This program was able to reach 836 young children aged between 10-12 in 7 schools over four months with the support of Sida Swedish International Development Agency and Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung. Now they are proceeding with the program in 5 new schools with the support of the Pontifical Mission. The program targets the children of the most devastated areas; Al Shujaiya, Al Zaitoon, Al Tufah, Rafah, Beit Hanoun, Khan Younes, and Khouza'a.

The school headmistresses and headmasters approached the main trainer emphasizing the importance of this programme and its positive effects on the psychology of the participants, and requested that ASHTAR Theatre extends this important programme to reach all the students in their schools.

The work with school students included:

- More than 50 drills based on the Theater of the Oppressed manual to enable the students participate and get involved.
- Theater activities that develop imagination, the five senses, the fitness and the mentality.
- Physical and mental games.



Forth: Other Activities

✕ Karama Human Rights Film Festival 1st. edition in Palestine

With financial support from the UNDP, Movies that Matter, and A. M. Qattan Foundation, “Karama Human Rights Film Festival” in its first edition in Palestine was implemented between the 14th and the 19th of January 2014.

The Festival took place in 4 different areas in Palestine (Ramallah, Jerusalem, Gaza and Nablus), during the Festival 19 films (Palestinian, Arab and international) which tackle human rights issues in its different aspects will be screened.

Karama Human Rights Film Festival in Palestine is an extension of Karama Jordan that has started in December 2010. Palestine was always a target for Ma3mal 612 Think Factory and the festival was not realized until the partnership between Ma3mal 612 and ASHTAR Theatre was established in 2013.



Artistic plan for 2015

Ashtar's artistic plan for 2015 includes the following programs and activities, pending the availability of funding for them:

- Touring with the professional play «Sinbad and the Monster».
- Organizing the fifth Edition of the «International Theatre of the Oppressed» in May.
- International tours of the play: “48 Minutes for Palestine” in Europe.
- Drama Training for Youth in Ramallah.
- Touring with the Forum play «Al Mirya Wa Al Qurqa».
- Producing and performing a forum theatre play in Gaza.
- The presentation of the produced plays under the Drama Training Program for Youth in Ramallah.
- Producing and touring locally and internationally with a Street theatre Play in Partnership with Jordan Valley Solidarity Group, funded by the EU.
- Drama Teacher's Training program in cooperation with Ministry of Education.
- Organizing theatre summer camps in Ramallah and Gaza.

ASHTAR team in 2014

- **Full time employees:**

1. Edward Muallem – General Director
2. Iman Aoun – Artistic Director
3. Rula Giacaman – Executive Director
4. Nael Bisharia – Accountant
5. Mohammad Eid – Actor and Trainer
6. Emile Saba – Projects Coordinator and actor
7. Lamis Shalaldehy – Administrative Assistant
8. Mohammad Ali – Technician

- **Part time employees:**

1. Rana Burqan – Trainer

- **ASHTAR's Gaza Team:**

1. Wael Afana – Projects Coordinator
2. Ali Abu Yaseen – Trainer

ASHTAR Theatre Board Members

1. Wafa Marai – President
2. Fayez Al-Dumeiri – Secretary
3. Omar Al-Jallad – Treasurer
4. Dina Safia – Member
5. Maha Mayo – Member
6. Yousef Aoun – Member
7. Ziad Jayousi – Member

Networks

- * Palestinian Performing Arts Network (PAN),
- * Anna Lindh foundation

PARTNERS and DONORS

ASHTAR Main Partners in 2014

1. British Council- East Jerusalem
2. British Council - London
3. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
4. UNICEF
5. Municipality of Ramallah
6. Bir Zait University
7. Al-Tira College- Ramallah
8. Technical Collage - Ramallah
9. Ministry of Education- Jericho
10. Palestinian Medical Relief Society – Ramallah
11. Yabous Cultural Centre- Jerusalem
12. PAPAN - Palestinian Performing Arts Network
13. Palestine TV
14. Ramallah Private schools
15. UNRWA
16. CARE International- Jordan

Main Donors in 2014

- UNICEF
- Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
- Sida - Swedish International Development Agency
- The Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR)
- EU
- Anna Lindh Foundation
- UNDP
- Welfare Association
- A.M. Qattan Foundation
- British Council
- Goethe Institute
- Emerenzian Establishment, Jerusalem

Contact Us

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