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CEPAL is a not-for-profit organization, founded in 1996 by individuals who share a deep commitment to the respect of human dignity and the rights of all people. Our objective is to assist the Palestinian refugees in the pursuit of their basic human rights by increasing their access to education, and by raising public awareness in Canada about their struggle.

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CEPAL's Summer 2001 Volunteer Program *by Hala Al-Madi*

I write after returning from one of the most exciting and challenging journeys I have ever taken. As some of you may know, I had the honour of visiting the camps in Lebanon this summer, to witness the implementation of our programs firsthand, to meet with our different NGO partners, and most importantly, to come face to face with the people who live there.



2001 Intern, Jessica & 'the kids'. Photo: H. Al-Madi

This summer presented us with many challenges. The passing over of responsibilities from our former Overseas Programs Director, Andrea Becker, was a formidable challenge indeed. Andrea built connections and relationships with people on many different levels, and it was essential to maintain these links and keep them growing. Our Field Coordinator, Giulia El-Dardiry, rose to the occasion, and dedicated 3 months of her summer to this task, on top of which she had to run the current Summer Program and initiate our first ever classes in Wavell Camp, near Baalbak in the Beqaa Valley.

I am proud to say this summer was our most successful to date. The caliber of our volunteers this year was truly EXCELLENT. They all exhibited the same strengths necessary to succeed in the field: enthusiasm; flexibility; adaptability; social sensitivity; a respect for others, which in turn earned them even more respect back. They took their responsibilities towards the students and the rest of the community very seriously, and showed the utmost level of commitment under challenging circumstances. I stayed behind in Bourj El-Barajneh a week after they left, and it was truly a different place. Everyone spoke of them so highly. They have set such high standards for those who are to follow in the years to come- we feel so lucky to have had such great volunteers. Their names (Elisabeth, Alex, Jordan, Shannon) will stay in people's minds and hearts for a long time to come.

As for our volunteers in Wavell, we could not have hoped for a more successful pair! Jessica and Hala were the first two 'foreign' volunteers to live and work in this neglected camp. They faced a great number of challenges, and dealt with them brilliantly. The camp community embraced them with so much admiration and affection. Despite the extremely conservative nature of the society in Wavell, their integration into the camp was a great success, as they had worked extremely hard to earn the respect of everyone there. It is safe to say that Wavell Camp will never be the same. What I saw in the camps brought home the importance of our continued presence there.

Our volunteers make friends, and become new members of the families. They provide a lifeline; a sympathetic ear and an open heart. People truly appreciate them, and feel a sense of connection with them. This is so important when you live from day to day with only one thought: I am stateless; I cannot own property; I cannot work; I cannot reach my potential as a journalist, an engineer, an artist. There are too many things that these refugees **cannot** do, and each day seems a monotonous repetition of what has happened the day before. Having contact with sympathetic volunteers gives them a sense of perspective, and maintains a glimmer of hope where there would be none.

My meetings with our partner NGOs confirmed the same thing. NGOs working in the camps are the only real support that Palestinian refugees have. Amongst many things, they provide educational and recreational activities for children of different ages; vocational training to young adults; employment to many who would otherwise be destitute (as the rate of unemployed male heads of families is quite high, and on the rise). The needs for these services continue to grow, and with this growth comes a necessity for more staff to implement programs. This is where volunteers are essential, since they provide the man power (or woman power in our case this year) to support these programs. There are many local volunteers, of course. However, teachers from places like Canada provide the language skills necessary to teach their language reinforcement classes. In addition, they become first-hand witnesses of the injustices that these refugees endure, and they are the ideal channels for bringing this information home to Canada, and ensuring that as many people know about it as possible.

What strikes me as most painful is how the lives of so many refugees have been somehow placed on the 'back burner', as they say here in North America. In this day and age, only tragic events such as mass killings, famine or natural disasters are deemed worthy of one's attention. The people I met, from the 98 year-old grandfather to the young children playing with marbles in the alleyways, did not become refugees some 30 second sound bytes ago. Their statelessness has lasted 53 years. It has become an old story, mundane, not news-worthy. Yet for each one of these people, the injustices of these 53 years are not old news. They wake up to them afresh every morning, and live through them every day, and go to

sleep knowing that the following day will bring a replay of the same feelings and thoughts. And the same sense of despair.

There are no words that can describe my feelings as I stayed in my home amongst my families at Bourj el-Barajneh. I do know one thing: once you visit these camps, you can never look away. The fact that CEPAL only plays a small role in the overall scheme of things should not diminish from the fact that we do make a difference. We really do. And now, with the world's eyes and ears turned away, distracted by other tragic events, we must remember to lend our hands and hearts to our precious friends in the camps. They need us more than ever before. As such, we need to keep CEPAL growing with all our strength and support. Besides expanding our membership base, we must institute a solid group of local volunteers who will make the organisation more sustainable. I, for one, will do my best to help put this into motion.

The Innocence of the child... *by Alex Conliffe*

Alex was a summer 2001 volunteer, and is currently completing a degree in engineering at McGill University.

Aug. 12, 2001

Yesterday we took Walid, Yassin, Ahmed, and Tifa to the beach. The boys are 11-12 years old and best friends. Their smiles are pure, innocent, and completely contagious and their excitement at going to the beach in Beirut was undescrivable.

These boys are amazing because although they love your presence, you don't feel that they need you to have fun -- they get along well and create the games they need to have fun. We swam lots in the sea... the dirty dirty sea where chunks of garbage constantly cling to your baggy clothes... and we said it was beautiful, that the sea was the most beautiful thing ever, and more beautiful than the sea in Canada. We buried the boys in sand and made sand castles with them, played football and ate ice cream. As we were walking home, one of them looked over to Jordan, one of the volunteers, and said with a casual voice but with a look of pure affection in his eyes; "Take me back to Canada with you."

God if I could, I'd bring them all back to Canada with me and watch them grow, thrive, and prosper. They're leaders but won't have the opportunity to use their skills here. So often I see elements of my friends here in the kids at Bourj. I see Mariam in Life Sciences, Jennifer in Law -- I see Sahar as the one that is always a bit crazy, Nadia the beautiful one who's always torn between being good and having a bit too much fun. I see Ahmed on the football team, Yassin as an engineer. And then I remember that until we allow Palestinians their right to be humans, these children will never be any of these things. They'll always be strong, and they'll always smile (though how, sometimes I wonder) but there are so many dreams that will never come true.



Vocational Technical Center. Photo: H. Al-Madi

A journal entry from Wavell Camp

by *Hala Khalaf* Summer 2001
Volunteer, Hala is currently studying at the University of Waterloo

...I already knew that she would be quite a character from the mere sound of her voice. It was characterized by a hoarse rasping that indicated years and years of cigarettes dangling from her dry, chapped lips. Only those with the weight of the world's problems burdening their weary shoulders have voices like hers.

She takes short, careful steps, hindered by a limp brought on by a stroke to her left leg, probably caused from the excessive smoking she relies on to ease her pain and suffering. Her eyes are kind, but oh so so sad. After only a few seconds of meeting her and being in her company, I knew she was a woman I would grow to admire and love, like everyone else I had met here in Wavell. She is the grandmother of one of my favourite students: Hisham Juda. And the evening we spent at her house was one of the most enjoyable we had spent at the camp so far. I truly could not wait for all the late nights we'll be spending there.

No sort of formality or etiquette was introduced by her; she was as natural as natural can be. We felt at ease the moment we took our seats. She greeted us with a hearty handshake and bent forward to accept our kisses. My mouth felt dry against her withered cheeks, and from her firm handshake, I could still sense, feel and almost touch the iron will and strength coursing through her seemingly old, frail body. I truly haven't met anyone like her before.

Little by little, her story came out, like pieces of an incomplete yet intriguing puzzle. Her family and that of her beloved grandson's were scattered around the globe like the ashes escaping from a long burnt-out fire. Twenty-four years ago was the last time she had seen her then twenty-year-old son. This old woman has no idea if he is alive or dead to this day. All she knows is that twenty-four years ago, she was informed that he was missing. To this day, his body has not been recovered, nor has any news regarding him reached her ever-waiting ears. But she says to me, "He is alive, living and breathing." She is convinced he is still alive. Her faith gives her strength. What I wonder: how many other Palestinian mothers are waiting still, with bleeding hearts and held-back tears?

Um Subhi wakes up in the middle of the night after a fitful sleep filled with worries and nightmares, seeking the dullness and numbness provided by the poisonous fumes of a cigarette. She is plagued with worry over her daughter's family; Hisham's mother. His father – her son-in-law – is sick and unemployed. He has none of his family around him except for his wife and three children. His mother, father, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles and all the people he loves and grew up with are all in Palestine, in mortal danger every second of their lives. He has to live each day knowing that they are breathing so near and yet so far away, growing and loving and living and dying, while he knows nothing about it.

He has not seen his mother in over thirty years; cannot remember her voice. Talking to her on the phone is more than he can handle, for he cannot allow himself to succumb to his emotions and break down in front of his family. He knows he will not be able to talk for more than five minutes before his words start to slur into each other and his eyes are blinded because they are welling up with forbidden tears.

His fifteen-year-old son, Hisham, has to take over, talking on the phone with a family he knows only from pictures. In forty-five minutes, he tries to learn as much as he can about these people he loves but does not know, about these humans who are from his flesh and blood, and can die any second without any acknowledgement.

Um Subhi's heart aches for her darling grandson. And what kills me, what makes *my* heart ache, what makes my blood boil with rage and my throat feel so very choked up, is that this is but one family that has had to suffer the atrocities of 53 years. When will it all end?

Board of Directors Vacancies: CEPAL President 2002

CEPAL is seeking experienced and dedicated individuals with excellent leadership qualities to present themselves as candidates for the role of President 2002. The president, in conjunction with the board of directors (BoD), develops strategy and oversees the planning and implementation of all CEPAL operations, activities and programs.

He/She manages the BoD and the Advisory Board, enforces CEPAL's By-laws and ensures its legal and financial responsibilities and obligations are met, actively represents the organization at senior-level functions and meetings, and maintains and develops strategic partnerships and affiliations.

The successful candidate will be required to:

- commit 15 to 20 hours per week on related duties
- plan and attend monthly Executive Committee meetings in Ottawa
- actively support the BoD in their portfolios including finance, membership, events, fundraising, communication, overseas programming
- participate in CEPAL events in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto on some evenings and weekends
- deliver speeches and presentations in English to large audiences
- give interviews to the media
- write and review proposals, letters and governance documents
- travel to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, if necessary.

Candidates must adhere to the following process in order to be eligible:

- President must be elected by 2/3 of members present at the Annual General Meeting on January 11, 2002.
- All members are eligible to run for President or another BoD position.
- Candidates should have obtained their membership a minimum of 10 days prior to the Annual General Meeting in order to vote, nominate a candidate or to run for any BoD position.
- Candidates must submit 2 nominations from other members in writing 10 days prior to the Annual General Meeting to the attention of President at CEPAL, 3rd Level, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2.

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact current President Maysa Jalbout at T. (613) 236-7825 or via email at maysaj@magma.ca to discuss the position in greater detail.

Please note that CEPAL is an entirely volunteer managed organization.

Appreciation Corner

Every bit of help counts! It is only with the ongoing financial support, encouragement and precious time of our volunteers and partners that CEPAL has been able to sustain and grow its activities both in Lebanon and in Canada.

We salute all our supporters and hope to continue to be worthy their confidence and commitment. This edition we extend a special thank you to: Olfat Mahmoud of the Women's Humanitarian Organization (WHO) in Bourj El-Barajneh camp and Nuhad Hamad of Najdeh in Shatila camp in Lebanon. Their organizations have been our partners from day one and it is only with their help that we have been able to expand and strengthen our programs.

On a personal level, their ongoing guidance, support and hospitality have been instrumental in the success of our teaching programs in Lebanon. They have also truly been a constant source of inspiration and an example to all our volunteers and coordinators on working with the children in the refugee camps. We look forward to working with you again next year and wish you strength in your efforts.

To learn more about WHO and Najdeh please refer to "Our Partner" at www.cepal.ca.

We sincerely appreciate your ongoing support!

CEPAL Executive

Where do you sleep?: week four

by *Shannon Dow*. 2001 Volunteer, Shannon is currently completing a degree at McGill University.

'Where do you sleep?' I asked Samah while standing in the living area of her family's home, quickly realizing that this room held a view of the entire house and that from where I was standing, there was little more of the house to see. She directed me through a doorway to the second room of her home. While pointing to a cement floor where one single-bed mattress lay trapped in a corner, she replied - 'Here, we all sleep here'.

Eight people live in Samah's two-room house in Shatila, a Palestinian refugee camp near Beirut and only minutes away from where I live in Bourj El Barajneh. The living area of her home is small and dark. One window allows for a glimpse of sunlight to shine in from the narrow alleyway that forms a street outside. Electricity is supplied to the camps only sporadically, so for most of the day there is no electricity to supply light to this tiny bungalow. The walls are covered in Arabic scroll, cartoon pictures, and black fingerprints from the many children who have written, drawn, and touched the walls - those children who live in Samah's home and the children of neighbors and friends who run in and out during the day. The floor is made of cement and it too is black with the dirt and grime of the alleys outside - regardless, we always, always clean our shoes before entering the home. The living area is lined with old cushioned chairs, one long couch, one small wooden coffee table, and two or three plastic lawn chairs for guests. A television remains situated on a wooden stand in the living area. It is left on all day long, or at least when the electricity is working, and provides a means of entertainment in the absence of anything better to do.

The kitchen is a converted closet that joins the room where they sleep - which also seems to be the laundry room and the bathroom. Samah's mother says that her work is as a cook. She remains in this closet preparing meals for her family for most of the day. They do not have a refrigerator. There are no cupboards. The house is empty walled yet full with people.

'I don't like living here', replied Samah when I asked her if she liked Shatila, 'life for people is bad here, there are many problems for men and women'. Life is bad here; this place is a shit hole. There is garbage everywhere. Those who work don't make enough money to get out of this shit hole. It is dark in the alleys and crowded in the streets. Children are ill because they lack a clean place for which to play, so they play in the streets amongst the garbage and the sewage and the pollution. Many of the women and children never leave the camp. Many of the children have never seen Beirut. Many of the children have never seen an elevator.

Samah is fifteen years old; she wants to leave. 'If I go with you can I stay in Canada?' she asked me today. 'First I will travel to Canada and then to Palestine' she told me 'because I'm not allowed to go to Palestine from here'. She wants me to marry her uncle, and she wants me to find her a Canadian man to marry. And I joke with them and I tell them that they can all join me in Canada, that I will carry each of them home in my backpack, and they all laugh. Yet when they look at me I see more in their eyes than a simple sparkle from laughter. Their eyes sparkle under the shimmer that hope provides, the hope that I will help them leave. And what do you say to a fifteen-year-old girl who looks at you this way? What do you say to her six-year-old sister, her four younger brothers, her mother, her father, and her uncle? Honesty would break their hearts, and it seems as though the truth is nothing but cruel.

Playgrounds: week two in Bourj

by *Shannon Dow*

Some of the children play, and some of them work. Everything becomes normal so quickly that you hardly notice who is who until you stop to look, or more importantly, to see.

The day begins at 8:30 and I walk to school through the camp before the alleys become filled with people. I leave before the elders arrive to run their shops - selling fruit and vegetables or running a convenience store - and before the young men awake to take their positions standing along storefronts or sitting on plastic lawn chairs that line the walkways. I leave before they prepare themselves for a day of simply waiting. Imagine spending your life just waiting. Most of the young men do nothing except to watch every passing person - especially the women, and most especially the foreigners. They don't work because they can't, or more so because they are not given the right to work - at least in any decent profession. They don't leave because they haven't the money to go anywhere. They don't go to school because they are too old for high school and they can't afford college. Most of all they don't go to school because they find further education pointless - why become a doctor or an engineer if, because of who you are, you are prohibited to practice?

Some of the children play. They smile and laugh and scream and run in these tiny alleyways - and they are narrow, these alleyways, most measuring but a few meters in width, some only wide enough for one person to squeeze through at any given moment. Yet the children still manage to play. The alleys are their fields; they are their basketball courts, their playgrounds, and their backyards. The children play football and ride their bikes, and they all have scooters and basketballs. The children are the camp. They are life. Their smiles and laughter, I think, are what make everyday more human



CEPAL Open House, July 2001. Photo: K. Elliott

and more livable. And it is so easy to walk by and to see their smiles and to hear their laughter and to consider this, the alleys as their fateful playground, normal. Normal simply because you lose sight of any other comparison - everyone lives this way here - and what is normal is only normal in comparison to something else, to someone else, to some other place or time. Yet in slowing down, by stopping to look and to really see these children running in the alleys, playing marbles along a stream of sewage-filled water, sitting along dirty and garbage-filled streets - every single day - my vision, unclouded, makes me all too aware that this playground is far from normal. At the very least, it is far from what normal *should* be for anyone human.

And some of them work. Remember six years old, or seven or eight or even five. Remember playing. Remember not having to remember. Remember being free and untainted by things more 'adult', things like work. Children aren't really children here. They work - carrying wheelbarrows filled with bottles of water, lifting wood to build onto houses, working on cars, or selling fruit at a family store. The children that work do so because they have to. They work because they can't afford not to. And half the time I don't notice them, these young hearts with adult minds, simply because there are so many of them - enough of them to make their act of working seem normal. They are betrayed by their fate, forced to give up their marbles for a bucket and shovel. Most times I struggle not to see. I walk fast and I look down as I pass them in the alleys. I turn my head and close my eyes, anything to keep them from view, anything to try to stop that feeling I feel when my heart begins to sink. Yet not seeing is merely escaping, and nothing is learned by living life safely behind closed eyes.

I don't teach these working children. I teach the more 'fortunate' ones. But what is fortunate anyway? Life here, in every definition, becomes redefined. What was once ugly is now beautiful, what was once sad is now happy, what's up is down, what's right is wrong, and

what's normal surely isn't normal anymore.

But they seem to know what 'normal' should be, and perhaps this is the worst of all.

The Summer of 2001

By Elizabeth Ancitil Elizabeth, a 2001 Summer volunteer, is currently studying at the University of Quebec in Montreal.

The summer of 2001 will be one that I will never forget. I left Montreal on June 21st going into the unknown. I was so afraid, of what really, I do not know! Maybe of being a bad, boring teacher, afraid that the kids would not like me, silly things. After 11 weeks of craziness, I came back to Montreal on September 4th knowing! God I know, I feel and it hurts! And now I can't ignore. I guess that is fate.

Since my return, all I feel is sadness, guilt and anger. I am sad to have left my new made friends. I feel guilty to be able to leave... But I am angry that I did not know.

It all hit me when one afternoon between classes I went to say hello to one of my good friends. As I sit down in the living room, coffee is served. We zap through the TV channels and come to an MTV special on Depeche Mode (a famous British band from the 80's). Wow, all the memories that come back to me, the famous songs, the high school dances, first love, going to summer camp. Wow, it was a great trip through memory land!! Until my friend brought me back to her reality. Her memories of the 80's had nothing to do with mine. She says to me bluntly, at that time she and her family were under siege! Yes, her teen memories are of bombs, of people trying to kill her, of famine and horror. God I feel so stupid, ignorant and insensitive. While I was getting ready to go dancing, she, her brothers and sisters were fighting for their lives. Where was I? Why didn't I know? My heart is broken, I never knew. I mean, I sort of knew, but I did not know!

All my life I heard about the Lebanon war, I heard Beirut in the news, it was somewhere in the Middle East. But this time it had a different meaning for me, it hit home! She is my friend, but she doesn't look like someone who has been through many wars, she looks like me! She is my age, and she has lived half of her life (literally) in war. Obviously, it is not written on someone's forehead, what they have been through. You would never know meeting her in the street. She is also stunned that once again she is confirmed that most of the world has no idea of what happened in the camp's wars.

I am angry of that realization. How could that happen? Where were we all when it happened?

And now what can I do?

.....Talk about it!

APPEAL TO All CANADIANS

International Law and Human Rights in the Middle East

On the occasion the of the United Nations United Day of Solidarity with Palestinians (November 29th), CEPAL is appealing to all Canadians to actively support efforts to return to peaceful negotiations in the Middle East including an internationally monitored dialogue based on international law and human rights.

CEPAL believes that in order to attain a just and durable peace in the Middle East, there must be a just solution to the refugee issue. The irresolution of their fate perpetuates the largest, longest-running and most destabilizing refugee problem in the world today. The Facts are:

- The 750,000 Palestinians expelled from historical Palestine in 1948 are now over 3.6 million registered Palestinian refugees living around the world with 1.1 million refugees living for the third and fourth generation in 59 refugee camps scattered in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza.
- The Palestinian right of return is a human right affirmed by international law. Resolution 194, calling for their right to return, has been affirmed by the UN General Assembly, including Canada, over 140 times in the last 50 years. It is also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13) and in the sanctity of private ownership, which cannot be extinguished by sovereignty, occupation or passage of time.
- Over 60% of Palestinian refugees live under UN-established poverty line and unemployment, illiteracy rates, and child labour are on the rise. It is increasingly difficult to cope with the overcrowded living quarters (as high as 4,200 persons per sq. km) and schools (40-60 children in a class with schools running on double shifts), overburdened medical services, shortage of water and electricity, contaminated drinking water due to open sewers and lack of proper garbage disposal, and a lack of adequate mental health and social services.

As a people committed to justice, Canadians have an important role in promoting the rule of international law in the Middle East. With this letter, CEPAL affirms its position of supporting Palestinian refugees' right to choose to return to their homeland or to resettle in another country, and to compensation for their losses and suffering. As part of its mandate, CEPAL aims to give Palestinian refugees a much needed voice in Canada. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are urging CEPAL and the international non-governmental community to assist in raising awareness of their rights, especially the right of return.

Every Canadian can contribute to peace in the Middle East! Canadians can: 1) write letters to their Members of Parliament calling on our government to uphold international law and human rights including the Palestinian refugee's right to return; 2) provide small financial contributions to support CEPAL and other organizations' grass-roots efforts in providing basic education and other social services to Palestinian refugees; 3) donate valuable time to assist organizations in Canada and/or overseas.

Contact CEPAL for suggestions on how to make a contribution and to order a copy of the recently published "From Refugees to Citizens at Home" on a feasible and just solution for Palestinian refugees recently written by internationally renowned researcher Salman Abu Sittah.

Untitled.*By Jordan Topp.*

Jordan, Summer 2001 Volunteer, studies at the School of Social Work, McGill University.

I heard dreams of olive trees and orchards. Out of the mouths of 9-year-old children.
Who should be dreaming of toy cars, train sets and airplanes.

I heard their hopes and dreams. To be doctors, lawyers, pilots. And I heard these dreams change, into lines of a 12 year old child

Who already knows too much.

("I can't be a pilot, I am Palestinian")

I witnessed their beauty and life. Portrayed in gleaming smiles graceful dances unending generosity
We wore their beauty
In bracelets, hairclips, kisses and high-fives.

Children who are given nothing
Who cannot stop giving

I still do not understand how they can wake up each day. The same as the last
See their fathers go to labor,
For slave wages,
Over-qualified
Backs breaking
Sweat stained clothes.

To their mothers, tired.
Always tired
Of carrying the weight of their families,
The knowledge of a houseful of children
Without a future.
And still they greet me
Each day a step closer in the alleyways
Grins so bright they light up a camp that rarely sees sunlight
Voices, like music, breathing life into the concrete walls.
Giving them reason to be strong



CEPAL Open House, July 2001. Photo: K. Elliott

Pride in the generation to come.

A generation who,
At their young age,
Already know too much.
Know too well.

Who they are.
And what that will bring.
Hate

Injustice
Entrapment
Another generation born without rights, nationality,
simple freedoms we take for granted
Every day.

Yet they hold their heads high
Each other close to the heart
Treat each child as their own
Each friend as a brother.

In two months I gained a family.
I fell in love.

With the children,
Their humanity
Their beauty.

And in leaving,
I reminded them
Of just one more right
They will never have.

The Heart of the Matter

by Hala Al Madi

Hala is Director of Membership and Volunteer Resources

Only recently, I discovered that the human heart has an amazing way of surviving the worst form of abuse by its owner. Even when an artery is fully blocked, it will create alternative passageways- extremely thin channels- to keep the blood flowing. Naturally, the percentage of blood being pumped is diminished considerably, rendering a person weak, breathless and increasingly unable to perform the simplest task. One's quality of life deteriorates, until there is very little pleasure found in anything.

This sums up the life of a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon as I see it.

Most of us have different views on what makes life worth living, but I think there are basic factors without which we cannot accomplish all we set out to do. I believe that all human beings deserve to have a sense of security and belonging; clean and safe surroundings to live in; open access to education, and an environment in which they can put this education to good use.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have none of these basic rights. Their life experiences are marked by years of war, siege and massacres. Many remain confined in overcrowded camps, the closeness of which encourages the fast spread of disease. UNRWA, the UN department established solely for Palestine refugees in 1949, is still catering to a population which has grown beyond the resources available to it. As such, the healthcare coverage provided for them is



Ilham, Hala and Eman. Bourj el Barajneh, 2001. Photo courtesy H. Al Madi.

Call for Volunteers in Lebanon in Summer of 2002

CEPAL is proud to announce its **sixth** annual recruitment campaign for teaching in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

We are looking for highly motivated and skilled team workers with a great deal of flexibility, adaptability, and some experience in working with children, or teaching adults.

The deadline for handing in of applications will be February 1, 2002, at 17:00.

To receive an application form or make an enquiry please contact:

CEPAL, 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, ON, K1N

inadequate. The system of education available to them is in ruins, and higher education is too expensive for the majority to aspire to. They are barred from a minimum of 70 professions and trades, and that in turn closes many doors, which would otherwise have been open to them. Thus, their financial situation is reduced, especially due to the seasonal nature of the work that they can find, which is mainly in construction.

These are only some examples of what afflicts these refugees on a daily basis. But there is one thing that remains at the heart of what ails them: they are stateless, and worst of all, their original homes in Palestine are only a stone's throw away, yet they cannot return to them.

There are too many channels of life closed to these people- too many roads blocked. And yet, they survive. They love life, and so they create alternative passageways to keep it flowing. These people who have received so little, give so much- and, as I discovered later- have even more to offer if provided with the

opportunities to excel.

In fact, if we scratch beneath the surface, we discover a whole world of dreamers, thinkers, readers, artists. For instance, I was surprised to find out that Jameel, a soldier once captured and beaten by Israeli troops, now forced to sell vegetables to survive- was so well-versed in Arabic poetry and literature.

Kholoud, my dear friend, never completed high school. The last time she sat in a classroom was 15 years ago. And yet, she does not waste a single opportunity to communicate with all her visitors in English. That's her way of enhancing her skills. "One must keep trying. I'm not afraid to make mistakes. I'll just keep talking." That's her way of keeping alive.

There was also Abeer. Every time I dropped by, she would be bent silently over her piece of cloth, decorating cushion covers with Palestinian embroidery patterns- the result always magical. I always knew she was talented. But only by coincidence did I discover that she still dreamt of becoming a field reporter. Not only that, but she was also an artist, who did drawings for different organizations on demand. Had I not probed her with my questions, she would never have mentioned it.

There are even those who are able to take one step further, and rise out of their circumstances, attempting to pull others out with them. I have met many people like this, who, through perseverance have established local NGOs and become the heart of their own communities. These 'saviours'- for I can think of no better word to describe them- have devoted their lives to keeping this heart beating loud and strong. These individuals have the strength and vision to transcend their current reality and travel towards where they know their people could be; and **should** be.



CEPAL Open House, July 2001. Photo: K. Elliott

CEPAL is pleased to announce the establishment of an Alumni Group!

This initiative draws on the wealth of experience, expertise and valuable commitment of Former CEPAL Board Members and Overseas Volunteers. CEPAL will look to this group for support and advice on operational issues in Canada and in Lebanon as well as overall long-term strategic issues.

We are also pleased that Mark Zeitoun (former President of CEPAL), Andrea Becker (former Board Member and Overseas Volunteer Coordinator), Mona Marshy (former Board Member), and Deirdre Collings-Rohozinski (former Advisory Board Member) have all agreed to become the first members of this group.

We encourage all former Board Members and Overseas Volunteers (and Interns) to join this group. Your support is critical for CEPAL to build on its past learning and continue to grow successfully!

As an alumni, CEPAL's commitment to you is to provide you with the following:

1. A free annual membership.
2. A semi-annual update in addition to regular emails, mailings and newsletters.
3. An invitation to an annual dinner with the Executive Board to update you on our activities and have a chance to reconnect with other alumni.
4. An 'open door policy' to your advice and suggestions.

In return, we simply ask you to keep us upraised of your contact information and hope that we can count on your support from time to time whether it be in being a sounding board, speaking at a CEPAL event, or opening a door to an opportunity where you are well positioned to do so.

As an alumni you would not be required but are encouraged to provide an annual financial contribution as a Friend of CEPAL (\$200-\$500). For more information on making a financial contribution, please contact Shannon Smith at Shannon_leah_Smith@hotmail.com.

To subscribe to the Alumni Group, please contact Hala Al-Madi at volunteer@cepal.ca.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

CEPAL Executive

A Letter to my Volunteers...

By *Giulia El Dardiry*

Short Term Volunteer Coordinator, 2001.

I was walking through the camp the other day and I realized for the first time in a long time exactly where I was. I stopped. I said hello to Intisar sitting, as usual, in her shop, her scarf beautifully wrapped around her face. I kept walking all the way to Olfat's school, not because it was open, but because my legs naturally brought me there...to the classrooms that only children could possibly breathe to life. I turned back, back along the alleyways that have become my own through terrible exertions of memory. I ended up at Kholoud's – just one prison among thousands here. I kept walking, back toward the Adawis (maybe Ghada is in?) and the home that is still considered Olfat's. From the water tank I could already hear your voices laughing and I knew that you were all visiting Ghada – drinking tea, eating cookies, watching the terrible scenes of a lost and ravaged homeland on a television screen...I walked in to join you for another night of sharing, listening, laughing, and waiting...waiting for the electricity to go off. But we were lucky – you all left with fans turning and lights shining. I stayed.

I stayed and heard something that I wish you all had been there to hear.

Curled up on a chair, watching al-Manar (Hizbollah channel), Ghada asked me when Jordan was leaving. And Alex. And Elisabeth. And Shannon. And Hala. And me. *At least Jessica is staying.* She wasn't pleased. *What are we going to do? We got used to you now.* And I looked down, fearing that looking at her eyes, tears would inevitable find their way out of mine. I tried to smile and caught Mahmoud's glance. *Yes, he said, the house will feel empty without all of you.*

And I realized, sitting there with them, just what you have come to mean for the people in these camps. To Olfat, to Kholoud, to Ghada, to Nuhad, to Amira, to Samira, to all the kids (how could there possibly be this many kids???)...and most of all, to me. With patience, understanding and laughter, you have – in many ways – made this summer so much easier for me. And I know that it should have been the other way around.

I remembered picking Elisabeth up at the airport with Shaker, Alex shouting at the rat as we brought Shannon into the camp, Jordan making Mahmoud laugh with her singing of Arabic songs, Hala plucking my eyebrows before the incredibly loud mosque call woke us up, Jessica eating a few more helpings to cover for Hala!!!

Your acts of kindness toward me, the people in the camps and each other have been endless – do you have any idea? – and if there is any consolation to be had, you can rest assured that you have made people's lives just a little brighter – whether by having that extra helping, or playing another round of arm-wrestling, or simply listening – that you have given hope, and that you have earned a permanent place in the hearts of everyone who has met you. This is what the camps are saying, listen and you'll hear what you have to be proud of.

And I also know that in feeling the love and warmth bestowed upon you, sadness will inevitable seep through your skin, tears swell up in your eyes. What can I possibly say? We have been blessed in our lives to be able to run, learn, travel, be free (what a tired cliché it seems here among dreams of freedom)...and we have come to love people who are slowly losing even the ability to dream.

But remember that the caged bird always sings. Remember that the caged bird always sings of freedom.



Alex, Hala, Jessica, Hala, Jordan, Shannon & Elizabeth CEPAL Overseas Program 2001. Photo: G. El Dardiry

If people are forgetting how to dream, you are the hope that will help keep a dream alive. You are the lifeline to a world that they know they should belong to, and so long as you remember them, the isolation that others have so mercilessly tried to enforce is shattered. The fact that you spent your summer here is a testament to their existence, it is a form of resistance.

And once you begin to resist you will find it very hard to stop...and this is why you will never really leave the camps, why you can be sure that you gave in an exceptional way, why you'll soon realize how important your being here will be in the battles yet to be waged – not so much against anyone – but for your friends and families here. “Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn,” John Wesley once wrote, and I know that you are already on fire...people here haven't stopped telling me about the joy in your eyes, your patience with the kids, your respect and love for the people and the culture...

“I know I can be frank with you...the volunteers have always been excellent, but this year's group was the best.” How true are Olfat's words. Thank you.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU: Sustaining Members & Friends Of CEPAL

CEPAL has two new categories of supporters: **Sustaining Members** and **Friends of CEPAL**. These categories were established to help us to begin to give the recognition due to those individuals and families who provide the financial support that is so necessary for CEPAL to conduct any of its activities. At the same time, we hope they will provide a structure through which we can encourage ongoing and increased giving to CEPAL and its programs.

The designation of “**Sustaining Member**” applies to members who pledge a substantial level of funding to CEPAL on an annual basis/per year. This guarantee helps to provide a stable base for our programs and plans. The minimum commitment for Sustaining Members is \$500.00 per year.

“**Friends of CEPAL**” refers to those who donate a minimum level to CEPAL in a given year. Friends of CEPAL are not necessarily members (although they certainly can be), and this designation can apply to one-time gifts. The minimum level in an individual year for Friends of CEPAL is a \$200.00 (lump sum or cumulative) donation.

Upcoming Events

January 11th 2002, 7pm
CEPAL Annual General Meeting
Location T.B.A. (Ottawa)

The objectives of the meeting:

1. Present the 2001 annual report.
2. Present an overview of the 2002 plan.
3. Elect the President and Board of Directors for 2002.

We encourage you to join us and to exercise your right to vote. The following is an explanation of the election process for the Board of Directors (BOD):

- BOD must be elected by 2/3 of members.
- All members are eligible to run for a BOD position.
- Candidates must submit 2 nominations from other members in writing 10 days prior to the Annual General Meeting to the address below.
- Members should have obtained their membership a minimum of 10 days prior to the Annual General Meeting in order to vote, nominate a candidate, or run for the BOD.

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns at membership@cepal.ca or:

CEPAL, 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, ON K1N 7Z2
 tel: 613.236.7825 fax: 613.237.5669

Other upcoming events :
Photo Display/Educational Tour
Winter Lecture Series
Visit our website for up-to-date details
www.cepal.ca

As such, we would like to extend our special thanks to the following:

Friends of CEPAL

Tim Dottridge
 Bahija Reghai
 Maxine Rovere
 Ray Rovere

Sustaining Members

Monzer Zimmo
 Drs. Jihad and Nida Shabib
 Dr. Jehan El-Dadah

Thank you!

International Law and the Israel-Palestine Conflict *(continued from pg 14)*

- *UNGA Resolution 34/70* (December 1979), asserting the need for any solution of the Middle East conflict to be in accordance with the right of self-determination.
- *UNSC Resolution 1322* (October 2000), which re-affirmed a number of earlier UN resolutions stating that Geneva IV applied to the occupied Palestinian territories.
- *Geneva IV, Article 47*, which provides that “the inviolability of rights” granted to the civilian population under occupation cannot be suspended or evaded by the occupying power.
- *Geneva IV, Article 49*, which prohibits both the forced transfer of the native population from the occupied territory, and the transfer into the territory of the population of the occupying power.
- *Geneva IV, Article 50*, which requires the occupying power to protect children from the effects of war and accompanying hardships.
- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 13, 15 & 17*, which provides that everyone has the right to return to their country, and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality and their property.

The arid principles of international law may seem remote from the anguish of a Palestinian refugee in Gaza, or the insecurity of an Israeli civilian in Tel Aviv. But they are not. International law is the direct reflection of the human experience, whose greatest lesson is that people want to live free of violence, occupation and deprivation.

The second *Intifada*, sparked by the failure of the Oslo Process to end the Israeli occupation, has witnessed a number of grave breaches of international law by the Israel armed forces. As a belligerent occupier, Israel is required by the 4th Geneva Convention to protect the human rights and property of the civilian population. As well, it is forbidden to use more than minimum force when confronting security concerns. Yet, as well documented by the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Israel troops have repeatedly used excessive and lethal force, including the targeting of children and civilians. Medical personnel and their marked vehicles have been attacked, live ammunition and “shoot-to-kill” policies has been used for crowd control, and targeted assassinations of resistance leaders have been regularly conducted.

The way out of the unendurable Middle East conflict has to focus on a guarantee of the national and human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians. Both are entitled to live in security and liberty. Both have the right to a viable state. The Palestinians living under occupation are entitled to the full recovery of the land conquered in 1967. The Palestinians living in Israel are entitled to the full rights of citizenship and nationality. Anything less would not only breach the rules of international law, but would ultimately prolong the conflict because, as the 20th century has shown only too vividly, people living in oppressive or colonial conditions will not cease from struggling for a standard of right from the ashes of terrible wrongs.

How You Can Be Involved with CEPAL

Join our e-mail list. Cepal mailing CEPAL mailings are distributed on average bi-weekly in order to provide an alternative news source on issues concerning Palestinian refugees, and updates about Cepal and related activities. You may write to info@cepal.ca.

Become a volunteer: We have a number of volunteer positions available, and we are always looking for people would like to give their skills and time. A volunteer form is enclosed at the back of this pamphlet, or you may write to membership@cepal.ca for more information.

Become a member: Members, as well as volunteers, form the backbone of CEPAL, and help to continue its success. Please consult the membership page, and if you are interested in becoming a member, write to membership@cepal.ca.

Make a donation: The kindness and generosity of private donors has kept CEPAL's programs running, and made it possible for us to venture into new realms. If you would like to make a donation, please mail your cheque to **CEPAL, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa Ontario K1N 7Z2**. If you wish to receive a tax receipt for donations of \$25 or above, please write the cheque in the name of the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations, and CEPAL in the memo.

FEATURE ARTICLE: International Law and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

By Michael Lynk

Prof. Michael Lynk teaches at the Faculty of Law, The University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario. In 1989, he worked with the United Nations on the West Bank. Prof. Lynk has written on international law and the Middle East conflict. Micheal Lynk is member of CEPAL's Advisory Board, and keynote speaker at CEPAL's 5th Annual commemoration of the United Nations Day of Solidarity.

The disparity between the principles of international law and their political application has never been so wide as in the Israel-Palestine conflict. International law has spoken, frequently and, at times, sharply, about the legal principles necessary to create a just and durable peace

between Israel and the Palestinians. However, the lack of political will to enforce compliance – primarily because of Israeli obstinacy, American obeisance, and United Nations powerlessness – has allowed the conflict to fester for more than five decades. The irresolution of this conflict has destabilized the region, perpetuated the world's largest and longest-lasting refugee problem, adversely affected the world economy on several occasions, and eroded respect for the efficacy of international law.

Since the end of the Cold War, international law – and particularly international human rights and humanitarian law – has become the common universal touchstone for measuring justice and rights. In a diverse world, with a multiplicity of religions, ideologies, interests and cultures, the only rules widely accepted as our guidebook for living together have been the growing body of international law. These rules have won broad acceptance because they are non-denominational, they are based on equality, they recognize the rights of the dispossessed and vulnerable, and they emphasize peaceful means for achieving rights and resolving disputes.

Articulating the rights recognized by international law can be a powerful organizing tool for justice. While international law's great failure to date has been the lack of any effective forum for enforcing rights and acquiring remedies, the impact of a United Nations resolution, or reliance on a principle from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has the potential of creating enormous popular support. People invariably accept that rules which are based in law, have the



Women's Humanitarian Organization. River Trip, 2001.

support of the world community, and apply fairly to all should be obeyed and enforced.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The international law principles applicable to the Israel-Palestine conflict are primarily found in three sources: (i) United Nations resolutions; (ii) the Fourth Geneva Convention (Geneva IV) of 1949; and (iii) the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the subsequent body of international human rights law that grew out of it. There is a strong international consensus, challenged only by Israel and, occasionally, the United States, that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 is illegal, that the Palestinians are entitled to self-determination and to resist the occupation, and that the excessive force employed by the Israeli armed forces to suppress the various Palestinian uprisings is contrary to international humanitarian law.

The key international law statements on the conflict include the following:

- *UNGA Resolution 181 (II)* (November 1947), which established the right of Israelis and Palestinians to their own states in Palestine.
- *UNGA Resolution 194 (III)* (December 1948), affirming the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and to receive compensation.
- *UNSC Resolution 242* (November 1967), which declared that the acquisition of territory by force or conquest was inadmissible, and called for "a just settlement of the refugee problem" in the Middle East.

(Continued on page 13).

