



NEWS FROM Seraj Library Project

Empowering communities in Palestine, one library at a time

February 2023

Dear Seraj Supporter

In Palestine, winter is upon us and, as you know from the headlines, it is a particularly difficult time here. But as I heard someone on TV say recently, "I am a Palestinian so I am hopeful."

In designing our libraries and programs, Seraj aims to respond to local conditions, including the weather. In February and March, temperatures range from about 40 to 54 degrees Fahrenheit, which is "very cold" to "cold" here.

Read on to learn more about how your support makes possible a range of programs that make a difference in the lives of children and their families, particularly at this time of year.

Laurie Salameh,
Executive Director

Programs for All Ages

Youth

Children everywhere want to "hang out" after school closes. But in many towns and villages, Palestinian youth have no place to gather. At the [Aida refugee camp](#) between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, they face a particular challenge because the barrier wall now separates them from the surrounding recreational area.

But at the Seraj library in Aida, children play games, participate in English classes, and read books at comfy tables.

This library is particularly crowded on Fridays, when regular incursions by the Israeli military make it unsafe to play in the streets.



Families



Students and teachers from the National Conservatory of Music performed on the buzuq.

For many centuries in Palestine, it was traditional for families of all faiths to celebrate holidays together. This past December, Seraj's cultural center in Birzeit hosted a Christmas party in

partnership with the [Edward Said National Conservatory of Music](#).

Students and teachers from the Conservatory played [the traditional lute-like buzug](#) and Seraj staff member George Ghattas led the children's choir, complete with Santa hats.

About 100 folks joined in this event, grateful for a few hours of joy during a stressful time in the region.





Seraj staff member George Ghattas and his guitar led the children's choir.

Seniors

In Palestine, there is a strong cultural tradition that seniors stay home in the winter. For this reason, Seraj's outreach to this group is currently on hold. But these programs flourish in other seasons because no other organizations in the community serve them. Come spring, the library in Birzeit will draw hundreds from nearby villages for traditional storytelling, songs, and games.



Meet George Ghattas

George works with Seraj because he is passionate about sharing all aspects of the Palestinian culture. Born in Bethlehem, he was a natural to lead the choir at Seraj's Christmas party. He worked for over 20 years at the National Conservatory and, in addition to the buzuq, plays the cello, guitar, piano, and drums.

George was "instrumental" to the success of the October 2022 Seraj Trip in Palestine: He made sure all participants were well fed with the local specialties, broke into song to demonstrate the acoustics at a Greek Orthodox church and, along with the rest of the Seraj staff, was the perfect host.





Plan Now to Join the 2023 Seraj Tour

Buoyed by the success of the inaugural 2022 tour, Seraj [Executive Director Laurie Salameh](#) and her staff have set the date for the 2023 Seraj Tour: **October 8-18**. View a short (9 minute) [video from the 2022 tour](#), shot in various locations, with heartfelt testimonies from several participants. Clear your calendar for the tour dates and we'll send more information soon.

Meet Anne Cordes

Sending [dispatches from the 2022 Seraj Tour](#) was a highlight of the trip for Anne Cordes, who has now assumed responsibility for *News from the Seraj Library Project*. Having first visited Palestine over 30 years ago, she was amazed by the talent and dedication of the Seraj staff and the resiliency of the communities served. Anne returned to the States energized anew to "spread the news."

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