

## **THE SERAJ LIBRARY PROJECT**

Civic education is the best route to  
democracy, human rights and peace.



*The Seraj Story is Flourishing* 



**2022**

Annual Report to  
Donors

*Flourishing.  
For a Time Such  
as This*

**JOIN US!**

[Benefit.Serajlibraries.org](http://Benefit.Serajlibraries.org)



## Greetings from **Laurie Salameh**, Executive Director, Seraj Palestine

At Seraj, we are celebrating 2022 with a spirit of thankfulness and hopefulness. In the past two years we have grown in size to meet the needs of two communities new to Seraj. In the village of Kufor Aqab near Jerusalem, we are establishing a national storytelling center alongside a children's library, and in the village of Birzeit we are establishing a cultural center alongside our library and computer lab. We are thankful for each of you who has joined us in this dream and are hopeful we will continue to raise support to see these new centers active and thriving through all kinds of activities.



Pictured here, Laurie and her husband, Estephan, co-founders of Seraj

As you know, Seraj means “lantern” or “light” in Arabic, and we fully believe in our role as lighting the darkness here in Palestine, one library at a time, one child at a time, one community at a time.

With Appreciation,  
**Laurie Salameh**



## Greetings from **Galen Burghardt**, Board Chair, Seraj US



As Laurie has written, we have much to be thankful for this year. I have been delighted by the energy and enthusiasm that have gone into organizing Seraj's first ever trip to Palestine. What Laurie and her team have done is just magnificent.

I am also thankful for all of the inspiration and work that has gone into preparing this year's LIVE AND IN PERSON benefit. The virtual benefits that Seraj held the past two years made the best of a really bad situation, and we received very generous support from our donors. But nothing quite tops being together with one another in person, especially with the chance to enjoy the wit and wisdom of Amer Zahr.

It is a privilege to chair this organization. Thank you for your support,  
**Galen Burghardt**

Galen lives in Evanston, IL and is active at St. Luke's Episcopal Church



A Remarkable Story and an Offer We Couldn't Refuse.

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## Two New Libraries Lead to a Whole New Scene for Seraj

This has been a [monumentous](#) few years for Seraj. The pandemic stopped us cold – in terms of programs and activities. But in the pause a number of amazing things happened. [RIWAQ](#), a group of Palestinian architects, restored a set of 150 year old homes in [Kufor Aqab](#) (in the seam zone between Jerusalem & Ramallah). They wanted to have a library in their project and offered Seraj two houses. We were delighted to finally have a home for our long anticipated Storytelling Center.

While we were actively working on the [Story-telling Center](#), the [Municipality of Birzeit](#) (home of Birzeit University) approached Seraj. Their Old City (also a [RIWAQ](#) project) needed Seraj as a part of their revitalization. Would we join them?



It was an offer we could not refuse – and why we have been so busy in these last months! The two projects mean [Seraj is now in the national scene and a major cultural player.](#)



# A new Library and the Storytelling Center



The idea of establishing a [Palestinian National Storytelling Center](#) arose from the need in preserving and re-telling community stories and folklore. Support sprung up in honor of the memory of our former board chair, [Reverend Cotton Fite](#). This has been a journey of several years, which included rehabilitating the space, designing an inspirational center and creating simple but meaningful and effective programs.

This summer we held our grand opening ceremony. We are located in the [historic old village of Kufor Aqab](#) as part of a “cultural hub.” Seraj, along with several other cultural and community-focused organizations, are part of a strategy designed by the architectural preservation organization, RIWAQ to bring to life the old buildings and add much-needed safe spaces to community members.



# A New Library and Cultural Center

At the request of the [Birzeit municipality](#), we renovated a worn-down 150-year-old courtyard and its six houses. With the cooperation with RIWAQ organization and a great contractor we've rehabilitated these ruins into one of the most beautiful public spaces in Palestine!

The rehabilitation of the space and opening of the center is just the first phase. The next phase, for which we need your support, is to really bring it to life. We want to bring the highest quality books for both the children and adult libraries, to finish the café to really

draw people in, to create a professional stage with sound and lighting for up and coming artists, musicians, and writers to showcase their work.





# MAP OF SERAJ LIBRARIES IN PALESTINE



- |                 |                           |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| ● Jifna         | ● Al-Mizzra Al-Sharqiyyeh | ● Abu Falah         |
| ● Kufor Ni'ameh | ● Aida Camp               | ● Tubas             |
| ● Deir Amar     | ● Burham                  | ● Birzeit Center    |
| ● Taybeh        | ● Jiftlek                 | ● Kufor Aqab Center |

## 12 SERAJ LIBRARIES



- Seraj Libraries
- SerajLibraries
- Seraj Library Project



# A Newly-Created Board Directs Seraj Palestine

Seraj Palestine is honored to have a remarkable group of community leaders who have agreed to serve in a governance role. The Board meets regularly to oversee direction and strategy, finances, and personnel. Seraj Palestine is led by Laurie Salameh and employees 5 part time staff.

**Rami Asaad**, a financial director with experience in both nonprofit organizations and private corporations.

**Dima Bseiso**, founder and director of the only Reggio Emilio based preschool in Palestine and a consultant on early childhood education best practices.

**Salwa Duaibis**, founder and director of Military Court Watch, an NGO which accompanies Palestinian minors to their court appearances in Israel's military court.



**Bashar Jumaa**, Country Representative for VNG International, a Dutch organization supporting local government. He is the former Chief of Staff to the previous Palestinian Prime Minister

**Ra'id Malki**, Country Representative of the OECD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

**Carol Michel**, Public relations and communications expert and small business owner, formerly with RIWAQ, an organization which restores historical buildings

**Estephan Salameh**, Co-founder of Seraj Library, Project and Advisor to the Prime Minister of Palestine





The US Seraj Board continues to grow in its ability to govern our non-profit organization. The Board sets direction, establishes goals and a budget, assures fiscal responsibility. The Board is always looking for people who might join its ranks – please step forward if you are interested in significant and valuable service.

[Galen Burghardt](#), Chair,  
Financial Research

[John Cassel](#), Vice Chair &  
Treasurer, Adult Educator

[Diane Fite](#), Secretary,  
Artist

[Case Hoogendoorn](#),  
Attorney, Hoogendoorn &  
Talbot LLP



## **Our US Board Sits On Behalf of You, Our Donors**

[Mary Bigelow](#), Artist

[Pauline Coffman](#), Ed.D.,  
Adult Educator

[Peg Griffiths](#), Ph.D.,  
Senior Psychologist

[Mai Khader Kakish](#),  
PR Consultant

[Rima Kapitan](#), Attorney

[Miranda Janan Kharsa](#),  
Public Policy Research

[Heidi Levin](#), Photographer

[Amelia Miller](#),  
Communication Chair,  
Infant Specialist

[Senator John Millner](#),  
Former Illinois State  
Senator

[Nasser Nabhan](#), Educator

[Paul Parker](#), Ph.D., Professor

[Elizabeth Trost](#), Educator



# The 2022 Seraj Tour

*Transforming the way we see Palestine*



**Day 1** - **TEL AVIV/JERUSALEM**, Arrival

**Day 2** - **JERUSALEM/RAMALLAH/BIRZEIT**, Welcome to Palestine, meet the Seraj team and explore Seraj's Library and Cultural Center in Birzeit.

**Day 3** - **RAMALLAH/KUFOR AQAB**, Yasser Arafat Museum, visit Seraj's Library and National Storytelling Center.

**Day 4** - **BETHLEHEM**, We will spend today in Bethlehem, the Nativity Church. Visit Seraj's library in the Aida refugee camp,

**Day 5** - **JORDAN VALLEY/NABLUS/TUBAS**, Today we will explore parts of Palestine rarely seen on group tours: the Jordan Valley.

**Day 6** - **JERICHO/DEAD SEA**, A relaxing day as we will travel to the ancient city of Jericho and the Dead Sea.

**Day 7** - **JAFFA/MEDITERRANEAN SEA**, Today we journey to Jaffa, the port city on the Mediterranean Sea that is part of pre-1948 Palestine.

**Day 8** - **ABU FALAH/RAMALLAH**, We put you to work! The olive harvest in Palestine is without a doubt the most important season of the year.

**Day 9** - **BIRZEIT**, home to Seraj's newest library and cultural center. After today, you will have a deeper understanding and connection not only to Seraj and our work, but to Palestine as it was and as it is today.

**Day 10** - **JERUSALEM** A guided tour of the old city.

**Day 11** - **Departure** home or Jordan

22 US Seraj supporters made this trip to Palestine – We'll hear from a few of them at the Benefit.



# Seraj Finances - A Strong Response to a Deep and Continuing Need



## Our 2022 Fiscal Year

Donations & Benefit Net - \$196,058. A strong response in a second pandemic year! A record high, apart from unusual gifts.

- 198 persons and organizations contributed to this total,
- including 67 new donors who had not given in previous years.
- Organizational expense was a remarkable 4%. US Seraj has no paid US staff. Almost all of each of your gifts go directly to Seraj libraries and programs!

## Our 2021 Virtual Benefit, *Bringing Light to the Generations*

was a great success. Over the course of 5 days, we distributed 3,600 emails, each containing a video and description of our work. We appreciate the generous participation of so many; our donations and pledges combined to \$58,758.

## A Good Start to fiscal year 2023

We have already sent \$170,000 to Palestine, and are track toward \$245,000. During the recent pandemic years we had limited programs, but we've put a fantastic infrastructure in place to support robust programing as things open up. Watch us flourish, behind your vital support.





## **DONORS ARE KEY TO OUR IMPORTANT MISSION**

**We Need *YOU* – This Year  
and Every Year!**



### ***MAKE A GIFT of any amount***

It will buy books, computers and library equipment, provide fellowships for college students volunteering in Seraj libraries. Consider making this a recurring – monthly or quarterly – contribution. • monthly gifts help us plan.

### ***LET AMAZON DO THEIR PART by joining AMAZON SMILE***

0.5% of the price of your purchase goes straight to Seraj. Sign up at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and enter "Seraj Library Project" as your charity

### ***INTRODUCE a friend or a group to SERAJ***

Tell them why it's important to you, and to so many Palestinians. Forward a recent Newsletter to let them sample Seraj ... and show them our web site.

### ***CONSIDER The St. Jerome Fund and planned giving***

While we definitely want you to live long, happy, and fruitful lives, please remember that much good can be done with the treasure that one inevitably leaves behind.

***KEEP LEARNING*** Let us know ***If you're interested*** in widening your knowledge of Palestine and Israel. We're glad to suggest a wide range of sources, both historical and contemporary. And consider a trip there. It's a land both beautiful and troubled with histories and narratives that we all need to understand better.

**[www.benefit.serajlibraries.org](http://www.benefit.serajlibraries.org)**