

The Lutheran World Federation Jerusalem

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E-Newsletter Issue 1

AVH Aces Israeli Ministry of Health Inspections

Tensions were high among the staff of Augusta Victoria Hospital the day before the annual inspections by the Israeli Ministry of Health. This year's inspections would bring 23 Israeli health officials to tour each hospital department, with the hospital's licensure resting on the outcome.

"I had a pep talk with each department the day before," said Dr. Tawfiq Nasser, the CEO of AVH. "I told the staff 'Don't talk to them like you're on a checkpoint. Smile. Be Positive, be confident. You own this place, not them.'"

Nasser's pep talk, along with a month's worth of preparation by the hospital staff, led to AVH's best set of inspections yet. Not only did every hospital department receive outstanding oral reports from the inspection teams, but various departments were also promised increased licenses because of their high quality of care.



A picnic was held for AVH staff to celebrate the hospital's performance on the annual inspections. Here, a diabetes program nurse and nutritionist take their lunch break at the picnic behind the hospital.

The day of inspections started with a pre-inspection meeting between AVH management and the inspection team, with Nasser explaining the work of AVH and the history of the hospital and the LWF in the region. The 23 inspectors then split up for a four-hour inspection of each of the hospital departments. Nasser invited the hospital staff to attend the post-inspection meeting.

"To my pleasant surprised the reports went from very good to excellent to beyond expectations. [The inspectors] didn't expect us to be where we were."

The inspectors were so impressed with the kidney dialysis unit that they promised to license seven more dialysis stations, up from the current eleven that the hospital operates. Nasser sees the inspections as an example of a success story for Palestine and for the role of LWF in building civil society.

"You wouldn't believe how proud I was," said Nasser. "We are this little hospital. And I don't stand on the staff's heads—I let them run their programs themselves."

The AVH staff has also been proud of the inspections, which surpassed the expectations of inspectors who typically inspect Israeli hospitals operating on much larger budgets.

"It was an amazing effect [on morale]" said Nasser. "The staff looked at this as a victory at a time when Palestinians don't register many victories. They're still talking about it."

LWF Tax Case Postponed

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been serving the needs of Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem and the West Bank for over 55 years, and through its humanitarian work continues to be an important expression of the Christian presence in the Holy Land. The LWF, a non-profit organization supported by its member churches, provides material aid, medical care, and rehabilitation services, such as vocational training and self-help projects, to Palestinian refugees and others living in poverty.

The LWF has had a tax exemption agreement with Israel for more than thirty years, an agreement originally established with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1966 and then adopted by the State of Israel after the war of 1967. In December 2002, the Israeli District Court in Jerusalem concluded that the agreement between the State of Israel and the LWF had been terminated by the Israeli government. The taxes claimed by the Israeli Tax Department would put the LWF programs and all the services they provide to Palestinians at great risk.

Negotiations to resolve the issue are underway and recent talks have been constructive. The hearing in the Israeli Supreme Court, scheduled for September 21, 2006, has been postponed to June 27, 2007.

U.N. Trade Report Warns of Desperate State of Palestinian Economy

A new report released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD) warns that the dramatic decline of the Palestinian economy will likely continue through 2006, leading to even higher rates of unemployment and poverty.

Since Hamas came to power in January, the freeze on foreign funding has had a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy, forcing hospitals and schools to find alternative funding sources and leaving tens of thousands of civil service employees without paychecks.

"The economy of the occupied Palestinian territory is on the verge of collapse," reads the 19-page UNCTD report. "Projections point to unprecedented unemployment, poverty and social tensions." Projected scenarios for 2006 imply that the per-capita income in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will likely fall to half of what it was in late 2000, before an outbreak of violence between Palestinians and Israelis. Median income is also projected to fall below the absolute poverty line.

Along with economic concerns, the UNCTD report also analyzes the impact of the weakened social structure on the development of the peace process.

"Conditions similar to those now emerging have harmful long-lasting effects on the economy that do not go away once adverse conditions are alleviated," the report warns.

A full PDF version of the UNCTD report can be found at www.unctad.org/en/docs//tdb53d2_en.pdf.

New Term of Vocational Training Begins

A new school year has begun for the LWF's two vocational training centers (VTCs). The VTCR, in the West Bank city of Ramallah, has 67 trainees this term, eight of whom are women. The first three to four months of the term, students will be in the classroom learning theory and methodology. In the winter they will start apprenticeships at local businesses.

The VTC in Beit Hanina has 175 trainees for the 2006-2007 term, six of them women. The school managed to acquire 108 of the 128 permits applied for (more than 95% of its West Bank students), an encouraging number compared to recent years. VT students study in the fields of carpentry, aluminum, metalwork, auto-mechanics, auto-electronics, telecommunications, and plumbing and central heating.

Olive Oil Season Nearing

The olive trees covering the LWF property on the Mount of Olives are nearing their ripening point. In October the yearly olive harvest will begin, followed by the time-honored process of pressing olives into oil. Help spread the word of the LWF olive oil fundraiser, which helps support the Fund for the Poor at Augusta Victoria Hospital, covering medical fees for refugees unable to pay. A flier with information about how to order can be found on the LWF website at <http://www.lwfjerusalem.org/Lutheran%20World%20Federation%20olive%20oil%20flier.pdf>. Visitors to Jerusalem in October or November are welcome to participate in the olive harvest along with LWF staff and volunteers. Email info@lwfjerusalem.org for further information.

Visa Freezes on Israeli Borders

Foreign nationals are having a difficult time entering Israel and the Palestinian Territories lately, due to a new Israeli policy of denying entry at the borders. For years Israel has given three-month tourist visas at its borders, which prevents granting residency status to foreign nationals residing in the West Bank.

Individuals holding foreign citizenship are finding now that the process of exiting and re-entering Israel every three months is no longer practical. Owning a home, having a Palestinian family or holding a long-term job in the West Bank no longer ensure re-entry back into Israel/Palestine, and many foreign nationals, particularly those of Arab descent, are finding themselves caught in the new policy. The choice is between abandoning one's life in the West Bank or staying at home beyond the length of a

three-month visa, thus becoming an illegal resident.

The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem estimates that more than 16,000 foreign nationals in the Territories are living with their families illegally. With the sudden change in visa policy at the borders, this number will likely rise quickly.

The first official acknowledgement of this change in policy occurred June 22, 2006. Foreign nationals who have attempted re-entry since then have been refused, given visas marked "last permit," or told to acquire an entry permit, something that Israeli consulates explain does not exist. The situation has also impacted foreign citizens working in Israel and Palestine with human rights and peace organizations, putting their legal presence in the region at risk.