

## **Dar al-Kalima University: virtual Christmas solidarity campaign "hope from Bethlehem: peace for Palestine"**

The virtual campaign was launched at a seminar opened by Rev. Prof. Mitri Raheb. Founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University during which he said: "

As the first and only University in Palestine with the focus on art, culture, and design, we decided this year to have a special virtual campaign "Hope from Bethlehem: Peace for Palestine." Dar al-Kalima University is located in Bethlehem, that is the West bank, but it is the only West Bank university with a satellite program in Gaza. We have staff, teachers and students in Gaza. We lost some of them in the Israeli airstrikes, others are displaced, from others we have no idea if they are still alive or not.

As people worldwide are preparing for Christmas, they think of Bethlehem. Because of the war on Gaza and as a sign of mourning of the thousands of civilians murdered, the churches in the Holy land have decided to cancel all Christmas festivities.

Yet the Christmas story is a Palestinian story per excellence. It talks about a family from Nazareth who was forced by the Roman Empire to evacuate from the north of Palestine, that is Nazareth, to the South, that is Bethlehem. Jesus was born to a displaced family. There was no place for him at the inn, so he was born in a manger. The situation in Palestine under Roman occupation was not easy at all. In fact, king Herod ordered to massacre all children in the Bethlehem area. Over 8000 children have been murdered in the Israeli airstrikes in Gaza within five weeks. The weeping that is heard today in Gaza resembles very much the weeping that was heard in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

Yet we have not Gaza here to weep, but rather to listen to first class music. This is also part of the Christmas Story. Remember in that night a choir of angels was singing. Gloria in excelsis deo. This was a hymn of resistance. The glory is god's only, not the Empire. With all his its military, economic and intelligence capability.

Peace on earth was also a statement of resistance, It was a critic of the so-called pax romana of the Roman Empire. The roman understanding of peace based on military oppression and dehumanisation of people who were not Roman.

The Peace that the angels declared based on justice, human dignity and equality.

The child of Bethlehem who experienced military oppression, displacement and I'm sure traumatization, grew up preaching blessed are the peacemakers not the peacetalkers by the way. It declared freedom to the captives and justice to those downtrodden.

Our musicians today will continue to this tradition the angels startet two thousand years ago. They will sing declaring a culture if life in the face of this culture of death. They will send the

message for the people in Gaza, that they are not forgotten, that humanity shall not fail them, that they deserve life in dignity, and not death. freedom and not Nakba, equality and not Dehumanization”.

He concluded his speech by thanking all those who stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people from all countries of the world and called for a permanent ceasefire and a just peace.

## **Think of Others**

**As you prepare your breakfast, think of others  
(do not forget the pigeon's food).**

**As you conduct your wars, think of others  
(do not forget those who seek peace).**

**As you pay your water bill, think of others  
(those who are nursed by clouds).**

**As you return home, to your home, think of others  
(do not forget the people of the camps).**

**As you sleep and count the stars, think of others  
(those who have nowhere to sleep).**

**As you liberate yourself in metaphor, think of others  
(those who have lost the right to speak).**

**As you think of others far away, think of yourself  
(say: "If only I were a candle in the dark").**

**Mahmoud Darwish**  
*Translated by Mohammed Shaheen*