

Dear Mr. Roger Waters

March/17/06

Through Mr. Mark Fenwick

From Rayek Rizek:

I am an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli, born in Nazareth and have joined Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam/The Oasis of Peace together with my wife in 1984, being then the sixth family.

At the moment I am serving in the position of the Mayor of this unique Jewish Palestinian Community.

I just learned about your intention to visit Israel/Palestine from our Public Relations Department, without knowing much about your exact plans, but I am very glad to hear that you have an interest in our community.

Wahat Assalam/Neve Shalom is the first and the only community in Israel/Palestine where Jews and Palestinians (Jews, Moslems and Christians) have chosen to live and to bring up their children together.

It is important to know that our community is not affiliated to any political party or group neither in Israel/Palestine or abroad, and that it became a reality thanks to the generous donations of many people and organizations from all over the world.

This community was originally an idea of one great and humble person by the name of Bruno Hussar (1911-1996) who started this project in 1971 on 100 acres of land that was leased to him by the Monastery of Latrun, which later in 1999 donated half of it to the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam..

It is important to realize that this land was a no-mans land between 1948 and 1967 then between Jordan and Israel, and today between the future Palestinian state and Israel. So even geographically and symbolically our community is between Israel and the occupied territories of 1967.

Bruno's idea was a result of his belief that the conflict in the Holy Land is between two just causes, and between two people who lived with each other in good neighborhood in the past and therefore they can do it again.

His idea was not based on any specific ideology or conditions, but he believed that first we should accept each other as equals and by living together we will be able to find the solutions to our personal and collective conflicts and disagreements on the basis that we should respect our differences and see them as a source of enrichment rather than a cause for conflicts. So Wahat Assalam/Neve Shalom is a dynamic experiment between Jews and Palestinians who got together with no preconditions and decided to live the peace now practically and not to wait for others to bring to them because we cannot tolerate any more excuses.

Our community is not a utopia yet but it is serving as an example of a possibility that many people see impossible and more importantly an inspiration to thousands of people who visit us every year. .

The idea of Bruno was not only about a community but also about creating a centre for Jews and Palestinians to come and meet each other face to face in a neutral and secure reality.

So as a result we have opened in 1984 the first bi national and bi lingual kindergarten and primary school in Israel/Palestine which was opened later to other children from the nearby Jewish and Arab communities. At the moment there are about three hundred Jewish and Palestinian children who attend our nursery, kindergarten and primary school.

Ninety percent of these kids come from outside the community and through their friendship they also connect their parents of whom many have become good friends.

In addition we have an institution by the name of the School for Peace through which and since 1978 more than forty thousand Jewish and Palestinian youth and adults have had the chance to meet and learn about each other worries and dreams.

On the 1st of May we are going to open the newly finished building of the Spiritual Centre that will be dedicated to the founder of our community Father Bruno Hussar and through which we will host meeting and discussions from the spiritual and religious perspective in addition to different means of therapy for the body and the soul.

Hundreds of families want to join us, but since the space that we own is limited we will be able to include a maximum of another 90 families hopefully in the next ten years in addition to the 50 who are living here now. We also have plans to build more centers that will serve the idea of the encounter between Jews and Palestinians to help them discover their mutual humanity.

We have a long list of such centre, such as:

Peace Gallery: through which we would like to present the narrative of the two sided of the conflict and that will also hold activities for school children and adults from the country.

Art Gallery: through which, we would like to exhibit works of Palestinian, Israeli and international artists and which will host workshops through art.

Auditorium: that will host music, film and theatre performances, of local and international artists.

Language Centre: that will offer courses for those who would like to learn Arabic and Hebrew.

Health centre: that will offer free Medicare for people who cannot afford it somewhere else since we have already few physicians and few nurses who live in our community.

Conference Centre: to host conferences in addition to the 40 rooms Guest House that we already have.

Through the past years we have carried some of the above mentioned activities. But we believe that we could do much better if we have specific and organized places.

Twice in 1985 and in 1986 we held in the community (when there were only ten families living here) what we called then Open Days of music and different art shows where tens of thousands of people attended. Those Open Days included major concerts of Israeli and Palestinian bands that were held in our Natural Amphitheatre.

Our dream has always been to revive those open days in order to publicize our community and its work, and in order to bring Jews and Palestinians together in an atmosphere of art and friendship. But the organization and the funding have always proved difficult.

Dear Mr. Waters: we will welcome you anyway in our community and we will always remain proud of your visit whatever and whenever it materializes. But would it be an exaggeration to consider the idea of holding a concert in the Oasis of Peace if you are planning such a one during your upcoming visit.

I believe that our community would be the most perfect place for such an event in relation to what I have mentioned above, and in relation to your intentions of sending a message for Peace without Walls as we have been living practically.

My hope is that you will consider my proposal, which I am sending to you on behalf of the community and its thousands of friends in our country and all over the world.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Love & Peace

Sincerely Yours

Rayek Rizek