The Global Campaign for Education (GCE)
Global Action Week (GAW)

Palestine – West Bank and Gaza
April 2012
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents 2

Introduction 3

Why Early Childhood Education in Palestine? 3

Challenges to Early Childhood Education in Palestine 3

The mission/demands of GCE Palestine 5

GCE Structure 6

- Media Personnel Training, Friday 13\textsuperscript{th} and Saturday 14\textsuperscript{th} April, 2012 7
- GCE Palestine Media Launch, Press Conference, Sunday 15\textsuperscript{th} April, 2012 7

Saturday April 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2012 9

- Jenin

Sunday April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2012 10

- Tulkarem 10
- Ramallah 12
- Gaza City 13

Sunday April 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2012 14

Ramallah Open Day

Wednesday April 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2012 15

Aqaba, Tubas Governate

The Big Picture and the Big Murals 15

Wednesday April 24\textsuperscript{th}, Thursday April 26\textsuperscript{th} and Friday 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2012

National March, Ramallah 16

April 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2012

GAW Official Closing Ceremony 20

Ramallah, May 09\textsuperscript{th} 2012

Conclusion 23

- GCE Outcomes
INTRODUCTION

Palestine has followed on its yearly commitment towards the right to education in Palestine, campaigning and advocating for Education for All and demanding its prioritization on the national development agenda through the Global Campaign for Education and its rigorously-filled activity week during its Global Action Week.

The theme for the Palestinian Global Action Week of 2012 followed that of the GCE, calling for ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’. The 2012 GCE theme retained great importance as Early Childhood Education in Palestine remains an issue of great contention. The early childhood education sector persists to be underfunded, undervalued and neglected of all sub-education sectors at various levels, whether in terms of provision, quality, access or monitoring and evaluation.

The need to proactively take a stand towards the urgency of advocating for a positive and developed local agenda in early childhood education pushed Teacher Creativity Center and the Palestinian Coalition for a Safe and Teaching Learning environment towards a rigorous lobbying and advocacy effort this year combining government bodies, local and grass root organizations, as well as relevant educational stakeholders in Palestine to envision and draw up context sensitive priorities for the sector and demand these priorities.

Why Early Childhood Education in Palestine?

In the Palestinian Territories 43.5% of the population are below the age of 15 years; 40.8% in the West Bank and 47.9% in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2008). Demographic trends with such high young-aged cohorts entail greater investment required in specific sectors such as health and education. It is therefore imperative that sound government policies are set in place to match and meet the demands of such a youthful Palestinian population.

Challenges to Early Childhood Education in Palestine
The MOEHE has specified in its strategic development plan a desire to regulate and develop the quality of education in pre-school education. Pre-school education however, is still being supplied by the private sector, non-profit schools and charities and the Ministry only supervises pre-school education by ensuring that physical facilities of kindergartens, personnel and programmes meet the set specifications and criteria set forth, in turn granting operational licensing. Whilst the total number of kindergartens provided has increased slightly, the number of students enrolled in preschool education has decreased. The causes have been outlined as a result of increasing poverty, the separation wall and the quality of preschool programs. Since preschool education remains funded by the private sector, it is raising the entrance bar of students according to economic ability and as such creaming off students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently children are being excluded from acquiring their basic right to pursuing early childhood education, let alone the underlying discrimination evident especially for children with disabilities.

Quality preschool education requires teachers with degrees in early childhood education, a professionally developed curriculum and small teacher-children ratios. At the moment, no preschool curriculum exists in Palestine leaving it up to teachers to produce learning materials for children consisting mostly of worksheets and practical activities dispensed at their discretion. Qualification levels of teachers also remain low. Furthermore, there is also a lack of quality control in pre-schools and kindergartens as the number of supervisors per each Educational Directorate is insufficient and diverges from the level of quality control strived for by the Palestinian Ministry of Education; kindergarten principals and supervisors also lack training, educational sensitivity and sound management skills in raising the standards of pre-school education; and lastly, there is a lack of facilities for children with disabilities, learning difficulties or those in need for special education and attention.

The problems in early childhood education in Palestine can therefore be summarised into the following points:
1. Lack of infrastructure for early education care in general; or improper infrastructural facilities.
2. Lack of trained pre and primary teachers, principal and staff with knowledge of how young children learn and develop
3. Limited public provision of kindergartens; nurseries and crèches. Currently early childhood education is mainly provided by private institutions, therefore, there is a large disparity in access and
quality by socio-economic background and other factors (including gender, disability and geographic location/area of residence) marginalizing many students

4. Inadequate coordination and financing of early childhood care and education programmes
5. Lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood care and education

The mission/demands of GCE Palestine 2012

(i) Advocate and lobby the Palestinian government to prioritize early childhood care and education on the national policy and development agenda
(ii) Institutionalizing free public provision and universal access to early childhood education and care
(iii) Call on governments to integrate early childhood care and education into education systems to ensure close coordination between holistic childhood care and education and access to and achievement in early primary education.
(iv) Ensure higher standards for teacher education and motivation in early childhood, particularly, teacher training (pre- and in-service training), induction and continuous professional development
(v) Increase salaries of early childhood educational personnel (including a yearly increase in line with inflation), especially teachers and day care facilitators
(vi) Develop an incentive system for educational personnel
(vii) Increase standards and improve the qualifications of early childhood and childcare professionals
(viii) Improve curricula and pedagogy emphasizing a childhood element and incorporates pupil holistic development
(ix) Achieve gender parity in early childhood education and care and overcome all forms of discrimination and guarantee quality early childhood care to both boys and girls, children with disabilities, children from low socio-economic households, marginalised communities or disadvantaged backgrounds
(x) Increase governmental budgets allocated to early childhood education
(xi) Align funding with national needs in Palestine
The Palestinian coalition for a safe and learning environment in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, UNRWA, the union of kindergarten teachers and several other local NGO’s that played an active role in the global action week dealt with composing the content and structure of the main GAW program for the GCE and its activities.

Teacher Creativity Center took it in its stride to ensure the work progress of the campaign and dealt with all aspects of communication and media, including documentation, information dissemination and translations. TCC worked on building and enhancing solid relationships with supporting institutions and sought sponsors for certain events, such as media sponsors and activity sponsors. It thus managed to incorporate the private sector’s social responsibility towards education as several large private Palestinian businesses provided in-kind support.

All organizations combined its efforts towards public relations and outreach, locally and nationally during the preparation and implementation phase of the campaign. Whilst organization representatives from the coalition were selected as part of the media committee who dealt with the dissemination of activities and events, the preparation of media reports and press releases. This also included the identification and employment of potential media organizations as part of the committee and consolidation of various media tools (including social media avenues).

Teacher Creativity Center and the Palestinian Coalition for a safe teaching and learning environment worked towards a rigorous level of local and national mobilization by stimulating participation in the campaign and by reporting to organizations and social movements concerned. As such, it worked to prepare promotional materials for the campaign (including posters, brochures and signs). It raised awareness regarding the campaign and the GAW week through organizational meetings and heavy advertising (be it through email; through the website; through press releases and media reports in the radio, television and newspapers). It also worked closely in a variety of educational avenues to encourage attendance, and ensure participation. This also included communicating and coordinating with local municipalities and local councils.
The campaign and the global action week also worked heavily on mobilizing youth and students. It encouraged the participation of interested students and youth and allotted responsibilities in which they were responsible for.

**Media Personnel Training**

**Friday 13th and Saturday 14th of April, 2012**

The Palestinian Coalition for a safe teaching and learning environment carried out a 2-day training workshop for media personnel raising awareness on the reality of early childhood education and provided them with insights on how to deal and involve the media in tackling educational issues. Twenty male and female media personnel participated in the workshop from various provinces of the West Bank who later constituted part of the core media grouped disseminating information and reporting on activity events for the Global Action Week.

**GCE Palestine Media Launch - Press Conference**

**Sunday 15th of April**

The Press Conference taking place one week ahead of the start of GAW served to launch the GCE campaign and draw out the aim of the campaign and the demands for the early childhood sector in Palestine. The Press Conference announced the launch of the campaign and demanded that Palestinian decision makers to focus greater attention to early childhood education whilst linking the needs to children rights as enshrined by international treaties and laws, especially the right to quality education. The press conference stresses the need to allocate further investment in childhood care and protection in order to achieve the full potential and development of our children. The conference listed a set of demands, most notably, institutionalizing free and compulsory early childhood education along with raising governmental budgets for this sector. The demands also called on the Palestinian government and Ministry of Education to bear full responsibility for this sector and work towards a holistic national strategic plan. Core parameters of this plan should tackle issues related to working conditions and decent work; increasing the number of kindergardens; teacher training and qualifications and enhanced integration of all children (i.e. full inclusion) especially for children with disabilities or children with extra needs and attention.
Among core speakers at the conference, Mr. Ali Abu Zaid, Director of General Education at the Ministry of Education; Mr. Wahid Jubran, Deputy Director of General Education UNRWA; Mr. Nizar Basalat, Director of the General Union for People with Disabilities; Mr. Mahmoud Zyadeh, General Federation of Trade Unions. During the conference, Mr. Ali Abu Zaid highlighted that early childhood education remains one of the most neglected Education for All goals and consistently falls short in reports on Education for All in Palestine, as it is one of the goals that is consistently repeated as a core avenue that requires increased attention on a practical level.

The audience included representatives from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the United Nations Agency Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, the General Federation of Independent Trade Unions, the Union for Kindergarten workers, representatives from the Palestinian Coalition for a Safe Teaching and Learning environment, other NGO representatives and the media.
Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and Global Action Week (GAW)

Saturday April 21st, 2012

Jenin

Burqin, Jenin Directorate

The action week activities in Palestine commenced with a marathon taking place in Jenin in which over 200 children participated in, in addition to the participation of their parents, media personnel as well as local participants. The sports marathon took place in the town of Burqin in which 220 students between the ages of 5-12 years took part in the activity. The marathon commenced in the school yard of Burqin Secondary school and marathoned through the town raising banners and amplifying slogans in support of early childhood education and the need for greater focus and attention to this core educational sub sector.

The participating students that won the marathon were in turn honored by the coalition members in the presence of various local NGO head figures in education and representatives of the Jenin Education directorate, Mr. Asad Habayeb; the mayor of Burqin Nour Eldin Khalaf; the mayor of Kofr Dan; coordinators from the school social committees in addition to parents and local residents. In attendance were members from the Palestinian Coalition for a Safe Learning and Teaching Environment including: Mr. Refaat Sabbah, General Director of the Teacher Creativity Center, Mr. Abdullah Jarrar, North West Bank Coordinator of the Teacher Creativity Center, Mr. Ahmad Amarneh, of Tamer Institute for Community Education and Mr. Mohammad Abu Haija, of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society.

The ceremony also shed light to the success stories of a teacher creativity project that targets early childhood education in the primary years, the success stories highlighted during the marathon gave extra weight to the importance of early childhood education and its potential in improving the academic standards and holistic development of children. The program had been implemented in the Jenin Governate and targeted underprivileged children and school localities that suffers from low academic achievements.
On the morning of the 22nd, events took place in Tulkarem with the Palestinian Union for Disabled People. A train tour ride across the town to highlight the need for considering the needs of children with disabilities in the educational process especially in early childhood education. The event in Tulkarem held slogans of enhancing early childhood education but with greater emphasis on the importance of eradicating discrimination in the educational sphere especially to children with disabilities as they are currently not being accommodated for their needs in early childhood education, especially with regards to primary years of education. The event highlighted the need to overcome current discriminatory practices towards these children and their right to enjoy an equal right to quality education.

Children with Disabilities Touring Tulkarem: Taking Steps towards Inclusion

On the 22nd of April, 2012, Teacher Creativity Center and General Union of Palestinians with Disabilities (GUPWD) organized a train tour of Tulkarem for children with disabilities within the Global Action Week. The tour was preceded by a ceremony and reception in front of the Tulkarem Education Directorate building. The train carried more than 50 children and went around Tulkarem city and its suburbs showing the campaign's message, accompanied by local and national media. One of the main slogans was "Yes to Inclusion for children with disabilities in education".

The activity, part of the Global Action Week, took place under this year’s slogan "Rights from the Start… the Big Picture" and focused on the educational rights of early childhood. The campaign aimed at bringing attention to the urgent need to ensure quality education for children from the ages of 1-8 years, in addition to psycho-social support and appropriate learning environment in the kindergarten. Enrollment of all children with disabilities in this age in an inclusive (infrastructural, technical and social inclusion) education system is crucial for their empowerment. Therefore, the GUPWD felt the importance of joining the campaign in order to give a voice to children with disabilities, who are considered one of the most marginalized groups, and to demand their rights to a quality inclusive education.
The activity started with a scout display, followed by a welcoming speech by Hassan Salameh, the Director of Education. Salameh stated that launching the tour from the educational directorate sends a message for all of us that our rights start here, in education. He added that "if we want the values of inclusion and acceptance of others to be part of our society, if we want a descent life for our boys and girls with disabilities we have to secure their chances to education right from the start". This includes pre-school education, basic education, cooperation with parents and cooperation with the community, as education is the responsibility of all, the Education Director proceeded. He presented, as well, the MoE's efforts in developing education for early childhood.

Abdul-Hameed Assi, president of the GUPWD, expressed the union's belief that "institutionalizing inclusion starts in the school first. Education is the basis of awareness and empowerment for people with disabilities. Education is also the tool to change negative attitudes and misconceptions of society with regard to people with disabilities and their capacities and potentials".

Refaat Sabbah, president of the Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA), hoped that the upcoming membership of the GUPWD in the Coalition will be a qualitative leap in the efforts made to increase access of people with disabilities to education, leading to protecting their equal rights in inclusion, access, health, livelihood and work, wellbeing and other aspects. Sabbah stated that "recognizing these rights can't be isolated from the need for public awareness, solidarity and national collaborative efforts based on good citizenship that doesn’t accept fragmentation of rights or discrimination in delivering them".

The reception was also attended by a number of representatives from local organizations that constitute the coordination committee for disability issues in Tulkarem, in addition to Dr. Hassan Ramadan, Education Director of Nablus District- UNRWA, deputy governor of Tulkarem, Tulkarem police, heads and officers of the various Educational Directorate departments, in addition to other civil society organizations in Tulkarem, local and national media agencies.

The GUPWD has joined the Palestinian Coalition for Safe Learning and Teaching Environment and participated in the activities of the Global Campaign for Education- Action Week (21-29/4/2012) for the first time. Considered a first step, this partnership with the Teacher Creativity Center (TCC) is
supported by the European Union through a three-year project entitled "Palestinians with Disabilities: Catalyzing Change". It is worth mentioning that this project seeks to mainstream values of social and economic inclusion as well as equal rights for people with disabilities in the Palestinian society. It aims also to establish the first Palestinian youth solidarity movement with the people with disabilities through supporting the full implementation of the Rights of People with Disabilities Law, especially the 5% jobs quota.

**Clock Tower, Midan Yasser Arafat, Town Center**

**Ramallah**

On the same day, a tent was set up in the heart of Ramallah's center square that displayed students drawings collected during child's day on the 5th of April and follows the big picture theme. The tent was decorated with the drawings of students from kindergartens, Palestinian government and UNRWA schools. The tent aimed to increase awareness and enhance the importance of early childhood education in Palestine. The tent also served to commemorate the lives of the kindergarten children who passed away earlier this year to a tragic bus accident resulting partly from inadequate school monitoring with regards to health and safety issues. The accident sparked controversy and debate on the lack of monitoring and health and safety regulations in kindergartens around Palestine. The commemoration served to highlight that we do not want another tragic incident to remind ourselves of the rights of Palestinian children. The tent as well as the action week activities demand the need to enhance an active role in increasing interest towards the development of early childhood care through guaranteeing a safe and quality driven learning and educational environment in all its aspects whether in terms of monitoring, the curriculum, the rights of workers and the training of teachers. Most importantly, it demanded that all children are provided with the rights and opportunities to enroll in early childhood education. The tent also gathered signatures of local residents who similarly demand increased attention towards education and early childhood care. The signatories included local business men/women, parents, white and blue collar workers; i.e. a cross section of society.
Global Action Week began in Gaza with fifty local organizations united under the “Rights from the Start...Early Childhood Care and Education Now!” slogan. The campaign included a number of activities that focus on the reality of early childhood in Gaza and the importance of early childhood education to the Palestinian people. The campaign focused on the “Big Picture” which will unify participants in Gaza with participants on the worldwide campaign while also creating an opportunity to participate for children and adults. The campaign activities aimed to give Gazan children the opportunity to creatively express their aspirations when they grow up, since the “Big Picture” involves taking photos, painting and drawing in kindergartens and elementary schools.

Mr. Talaat Bthatho, Director of the Teacher Creativity Center in Gaza, emphasized that the goal of the campaign is to “Expand and improve early childhood care and education, particularly to those who are weak and deprived”, since the focus is on providing more support to children and the local communities in all the areas of children development, including psychological, emotional, social and cognitive support. It aimed to achieve this via interactive activities that focus on advocating and supporting early childhood care and education. Bthatho also addressed the importance of civil society organizations participation in the activities of the campaign in order to advocate for and pressure the Ministry of Education to adopt policies that would improve early childhood reality in Palestine. Bthatho explained that 30% of children in their early childhood years are deprived from attending early childhood programs, in addition to a large number of children living in marginalized areas, where educational and recreational services are virtually unavailable; others suffer from overcrowding classrooms, lack of expertise of educators and underpayment of teachers, who suffer from lack of rights.

Addressing the importance of early childhood care and education will help to ease the transition to elementary schools and improve academic achievement; these programs also benefits marginalized children, since early childhood programs are considered an effective way to face deprivation and break out of poverty cycles between generations, especially in Gaza that suffers from an Israeli blockade and rising poverty rates.
Tuesday April 24th, 2012

Ramallah Open Day

Around 1200 children from around the Ramallah and Bireh Municipality participated in the open day carnival as part of the GCE Action Week implemented by the Palestinian Coalition for a Safe and Learning Environment taking place in Isad El-Tfooleh Center (part of the Bireh Municipality Park). The park enjoyed a festive atmosphere incorporating both educational and recreational activities. The carnival was divided into various corners, the face painting corner, clay molding, reading corner and the recreational corner composed of songs and theatrical displays. Nine year old Ala Khaled expressed her joy and her friends’ joy for participating in the carnival reaffirming her hope that such activities are replicated more often. Rashika Raed, 10 years of age, chose a butterfly to be painted on her face and stated as well as enjoying herself on the day she wished for the campaign’s demands to be met in order for Palestinian kids to truly enjoy and cherish their playful moments and rights that they are deprived of.

Each of the coalition organizations developed a corner related to their field of operation. Tamer Institute for Education provided a reading corner for the children and subsidized book prices on the day by charging a symbolic fee for its purchase. Books were also provided as gifts with the aim of enabling the children to read the books they liked since many of the families came from low socio-economic backgrounds. Teacher Creativity Center offered a play-do molding corner as well as face painting with the aim of lifting the spirit of children especially for those children living in marginalized communities and in light of the Palestinian context. The Hydrology Center presented an environmental quiz game and offered prizes for students. The Palestinian Medical Relief Society exhibited a theatrical play; whilst Hurriyat center brought 3 clowns to entertain the children. The Palestinian Red Crescent provided the day with volunteers to help in organising the activities and allocated face painting corners. The Animator Fadi Al-Ghoul presented a musical and dramatically interactive show for the children. The event mobilised a huge crowd and had been covered by the Wattan TV.
Wednesday April 25th, 2012
Aqaba, Tubas Governate

The first mural took place in the village of Aqaba in the Tubas Directorate. Approximately 170 people participated in the event including parents and children, as well as political head figures including representatives from the Tubas Governate and from the directorate of Tubas Education. Other participants included the security services in the province along with the village council. Mr. Osama Kasrawi, the teacher supervising the mural, stated that the mural reflects the rights of Palestinian children and assumes their self-expressions in addition to the meanings embodied in their drawings. The children drew Palestinian flags which means a state and the state means safety for children; the children also drew different shades of the Palestinian society reflecting the diversity and the need to serve childcare for all. The event discussed the unique situation of this village emphasizing the problems it faces due to the harsh imposition of the Israeli occupation that hinders early childhood education, mainly the inability to build schools or kindergardens or housing, thus posing grave concerns to the reality of early childhood education.

The event scrutinizing the challenges the education sector faces in areas classified as area C which falls under the full control of the occupational military force., an area of approximately 62% of the West Bank suffers from the demolition of buildings, complexities in planning and the difficulty of obtaining the necessary licenses. As such, there is great difficulty in obtaining the necessary licenses for school construction or renovation and expansion which has grave repercussion to access to adequate education and imposes restrictions on the provision of basic education to some 150,000 Palestinians. This situation has forced residents to build schools without the necessary licenses making them susceptible to destruction by the Israeli army.

Wednesday April 24th, Thursday April 26th and Friday 27th, 2012
The Big Picture and the Big Murals

Hundreds of thousands of children participated in the activity of the big picture in all public and UNRWA primary schools and kindergardens. The big picture events incorporated hundreds of thousands of students from Gaza and the West Bank who drew their perceptions of their ideal scenario
for childhood care and education. The specific events program in each school was left up to the
discretion of schools to determine the nature of the activities implemented, but most schools generally,
incorporated entertainment events and children activities, artistic activities, dance performances, theater
clips and competitions, as well as involving the school radio in addition of course to the Big Picture
drawing/painting activities. The school events were open to the public and for parents as well. Some schools implemented a whole morning of festivities for the children.

On Thursday and Friday, six schools were selected to take part in a large mural drawing across the walls
of their schools according to the same theme of the Big Picture reflecting the aspirations of children as
they grow - happy healthy children cared for in a secure environment. In general, the murals and
pictures painted/drawn by the children reflected their aspirations, their hopes and demands for a better
future for the Palestinian children where they can learn through a safe and quality-driven learning
environment, enhancing their character development and prepares them to be an active and productive
citizen. The images also reflected the impact of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian educational
process, the apartheid wall was evident in many drawings. Unsurprisingly, many of the reoccurring
themes drawn was of a Palestinian state and drawings of a Palestinian flags representing the safety
children see in an established Palestinian state.

April 28th, 2012
National March, Ramallah

The national march embodied several themes related to early childhood education, most notably,
confronting Israeli occupational violations against the education sector in general, and in Jerusalem in
specific. In addition to carrying forth the same slogan held throughout the GCE and GAW of
institutionalizing the right to free and compulsory education, the need to enhance decent work standards
for kindergarten personnel and minimum wage for workers in the sector.

The march congregated at the headquarters of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in
Ramallah and presented a petition letter (please see below) demanding international intervention to stop
the Israeli violations against Palestinian Human Rights, with particular reference to education. The
march walked towards the Prime Minister’s office in Masyoon to demand action from the government to
protect rights of education workers in kindergardens. From there the march head towards the center of Ramallah town towards Yasser Arafat Square (Clock Tower) lead by a band of school scouts. At the prime minister’s office, Dr. Salam Fayyad greeted and stood with the crowd stressing the importance of the GCE week as it coincided with Labor Day; the sixty-fourth anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba and the brave hunger-strike battle of Palestinian prisoners defending their rights to liberty; thus carrying much meaning for the right to protection and the right of education in the Palestinian context, especially with respect to Jerusalem.

Dr. Salam Fayyad also stressed the commitment of the Palestinian Authority towards respecting rights and protecting the rights of workers especially those related to minimum wage. He assured the Palestinians the government’s commitment and the change that will take place with regards to worker’s rights upon the completion of the governmental dialogue.

The presence gave a very strong boost and flavor to the end of the Global Action Week in Palestine and amplified the demands the campaign worked towards during the previous months. His statement also enhanced greater media coverage echoing throughout Palestine.

**The Petition Letter presented to the UN High Commissioner**

For decades, Palestinians have been victims of the Israel’s oppressive policies and measures. The Occupation violates International Humanitarian Law and affects the lives of thousands of Palestinians on a daily basis. The fundamental human right to education is violated on many occasions through military operations, mobility restrictions, checkpoints, settler violence, forced displacement, physical safety of children, school demolitions and the inability to acquire building permits for construction or refurbishment. All have overriding negative effects on the basic three parameters of the right to education for Palestinian children, in terms of availability, accessibility and adaptability (including content).

According to Article 50 of the Geneva Convention, “the Occupying Power shall, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children”, however, this is not implemented on ground. The Israeli Occupation has
created an enormous challenge to the functioning of the educational process and hampers the ability to ensure the right of Palestinian children to education, let alone the development of creating tangible long-term reforms in the sector.

Schools in East Jerusalem suffer a wide array of problems, including poor infrastructure, notably dilapidated constructions leading to unhealthy and unsuitable learning environments. Classrooms are characteristically overcrowded and lack basic ventilation. According to The Association of Civil Rights in Israel, the inability to construct new schools has resulted in schools being housed in rented buildings not suitable for classrooms and often do not have integrated classrooms, teachers rooms, libraries, laboratories or even playgrounds. According to official figures of the Jerusalem municipality, drop-out rates reach a staggering 50%. It is also agreed that a shortage of 1000 classrooms are evident.

Looking beyond the physical/infrastructural obstacles, matters in Jerusalem are further compounded by the order set forth by the Israeli Municipality in Jerusalem in September 2011 that coerces Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem to purchase textbooks directly from the Municipality after the textbooks have been purposely altered and censored of specific content material related to political, historical or cultural issues, such as the occupation, settlements, the Palestinian identity etc.

In Area C, which comprises 62% of the West Bank, Israel retains full administrative and military authority, posing huge challenges in terms of the functioning and administration of Education in these areas. A dire situation has resulted due to Israeli demolition and restrictive planning policies and permits on the one hand, and displacement on the other. Difficulties in obtaining permits for the construction of schools, refurbishment or even expansion results in extreme restrictions to supplying adequate education, or even basic educational services, to an estimated population of 150,000 Palestinians. The difficulty in obtaining permits leads to the construction of schools without permits , in turn, leaving them consistently susceptible and prone to demolition by the army. According to OCHA, the ability to even weatherproof dwellings or replacement by portable tents is prohibited. In Khan Al Ahmar School, for example, the largest classroom is a 9 meter room that has been divided at a ratio of 6:3 meters to accommodate for an extra classroom. The school has been unable to add classrooms to accommodate both additional grades or even to cope with the natural population growth. The school is now left with the extreme challenge of adding grade 6 into their school for the upcoming academic year in 2011.
has also been a record year of displacement for Palestinians in both Area C and East Jerusalem. Thousands remain at risk of demolitions and displacement in these areas consequently impinging on the psycho-social stress of children, enrollment rates and academic achievements of children.

Settler violence is on the rise and mostly takes place in the West Bank. The threats of settlement violence have resulted in deterring students from going to school and psychological repercussions on children at their tender ages. Checkpoints, road obstacles and the Apartheid Wall have delayed and hardened the route of both teachers and students accessing education and reaching their final destination points. This again has lead to higher dropout rates, especially for girls. According to a report prepared by the MoE, many Palestinians need permission from the Israeli military to travel to their schools and that the absence of teachers due to checkpoints contributed to pupil dropout rates, in addition to fears of settler attacks or army harassment on the way to schools. The Apartheid Wall has also causes disruptions to the school system since students and teachers are made to wait at the gates of the Wall. According to an MoE study, students spend more time at checkpoints than in their classrooms.

Israel as the “duty bearer” continues with its aggressive oppression of Palestinians and continues with its Judaisation policies of Area C and East Jerusalem while washing its hands of any accountability towards the Palestinian people. We stand here to deter Israel from committing further violations of international law, we call for:

- Israel to uphold and cease its violations of United Nation Conventions and codes related to the Palestinian people at large and the rights of children in specific
- Cease Israel’s policies that directly violate children’s access to education
- Hold Israel accountable for its legal obligations as an occupying power in accordance with International Humanitarian Law
- Stop the Judaisation of the curriculum in East Jerusalem
- Cease the illegality of the Gaza blockade and closure
One Million and A Half participated in the activities of the Global Campaign for Education in Palestine

Ramallah - May 09th 2012

The Official Closing ceremony of the Global Action Week for Education for All

The Palestinian coalition for a safe teaching and learning environment organized the official closing ceremony for its Global Action Week events, held in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The ceremony reflected on the coalitions achievements in general, with the participation of high-profile Palestinians including, Sabri Saidam, the President’s Advisor for Communications and Informatics; Wasel Abu Yousef, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Front; Qais Abdel-Karim Abu Layla, Palestinian Legislative Council member; Muhanad Baidas, head of the education program at UNRWA; Sahar Ghosheh, member of the central committee for popular struggle; Omar Anbar, general manager of education at the Ministry of Education; Hisham Abu Qteish, TCC board member; representatives from the Palestinian Coalition for a safe teaching and learning environment in addition to crowds of educators and media personnel.

Omar Anbar discussed the ministry’s interest towards the rights of children and in providing optimal preparation of children in their early years. He focused on the importance of the Ministry of Education in supporting all spectrums of society be it at the community, familial, politicians and educators level, in the promotion of early childhood education. Anbar followed by presenting some of the achievements of the ministry highlighting the most important achievement thus far, such as the near completion of a national strategy for the early childhood sector in Palestine as well as the establishment of a national fund to support early childhood. He highlighted the establishment of 46 kindergarten classrooms with a specific focus on marginalized and remote areas and the establishment of additional training centers for kindergarten teachers.

Dr. Muhanad Baidas underlined the importance of schools serving the community and the need to institutionalize compulsory early education enrollment in kindergarten due to its significance in developing students academically and personally prior to elementary school enrollment. He pointed to UNRWA’s long standing establishment in offering specific training for kindergarten teachers at the
Women’s Community College, which aims to provide Kindergarten teachers with high quality training, experience and academic knowledge in the field. Baidas emphasized the need for safe educational environments that encompass the academic, emotional, physical and intellectual development of children which has long been part of UNRWA’s development plan that strives for the advancement of education in Palestine or in Diaspora refugee camps.

Nabil Sob Laban followed by issuing the final statement on behalf of the Palestinian coalition for a safe teaching and learning environment, he stated that, each year in Palestine, in parallel with approximately 180 countries in the world, the Global Campaign for Education firmly takes off with the collective efforts of the coalition which brings together multi-sector institutions, including, education, women, health, youth and agriculture, in conjunction with schools, its students and educational staff, to remind and prompt officials of the promises made towards Education for All. He further asserted the various events carried out during the Global Action Week for Education, the marathons in Jenin and Hebron, the train tour event in Tulkarem, the awareness and vigil tent in Ramallah, the open day and entertainment events for children in various localities in Palestine, in addition to the various activities in Nablus, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Jenin and Gaza, the big picture event which amplified the voices of the children through their drawings, its colors and imagery, which carried messages related to their dreams and aspirations, in content and in form, highlighting the school that they want and are eager to learn in; sending out one clear and united message, demanding the rights of children from the start. He followed by highlighting the importance of the mass rallies carries out in Ramallah that took place on the 28th of April which addressed the violations of the Israeli occupation against the education sector in Jerusalem; the right to compulsory early childhood education; and the necessity of decent work conditions which includes the right to fair minimum wages for kindergarten teachers and educational personnel/staff.

Dr. Wasel Abu Yousef similarly confirmed national concerns over Israel’s attempts to distort the Palestinian curriculum in Jerusalem and added that similar focus must be placed on following up on the cases of Palestinian child prisoners held in Israeli jails; the suffering of students in the Old City of Hebron due to settler violence and army harassment; in addition to the educational obstacles faced by schools located behind the apartheid separation wall or those suffering as a result of settlement expansion.
Mr. Qais Abdul Karim, "Abu Laila", followed by greeting and honoring the Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails who are fighting for their freedom and dignity. He also called on all Palestinians to take responsibility for the lack of investment in early childhood education despite it being a critical juncture in the educational system.

Dr. Sabri Saidam on his part highlighted the importance of introducing technology in education, especially in early childhood and in basic educational stages, in order to keep students in tuned with technological developments as well as its relevance and effectiveness in the education of students. He also called upon the expansion of the coalition to include a wider and more comprehensive cross-sector approach, since early childhood education is a fundamental in order to proceed towards a better future.

The closing ceremony was anchored by Ali Abu Zaid, director of public education, and organized by Intesar Hamdan, social responsibility program manager at Teacher Creativity Center, incorporated the viewing of short film focusing on the activities of the Action Week and exhibited some of the drawings and all the murals carried out by the students, all of which urged the importance of early childhood education

Global Action Week for Education in Palestine which was held from the 22nd till the 28th of April under the slogan "Rights from the start, early childhood education and care now", enjoyed the collective participation of 1.5 million people in Palestine, including children in public schools, UNRWA schools as well as the participation of some private schools. The mobilization aimed to prompt local decision-makers to commit to the needs of early childhood education and care in Palestine and linking the needs to the rights of children as drafted and protected international, by international treaties, and locally, by the Palestinian law; particularly the right of children to compulsory quality education.
Conclusion

The Palestinian GCE campaign was extremely successful in mobilizing the Palestinian public en-masse in its “Rights from the Start” campaign of 2012. It is estimated that over one million people (including teachers, students, grassroots and community-based organizations, NGO’s, political head figures, governmental personnel and head figures (including the Ministry of Education and Mayors), media personnel etc) contributed to the success of the Palestinian campaign. The Palestinian ministry’s figure stands at a higher and staggering 1.5 million participants in this year’s campaign. The campaign was able to amplify its demands with the number of supportive individual which largely echoed in the media arena (be it written, visual or audio reporting) and thus brought the Palestinian national demands for early childhood care and education to the larger public sphere, in addition to the all important government sphere. The big picture gained the attention of the Palestinian public while the national march gained the attention of policy makers, thus enhancing visibility.

The greatest achievements of the coalition during GCE and GAW include the following: the prime minister’s support of rejecting the Israeli authority’s consistent attempt to distort the Palestinian curriculum in Jerusalem and the importance of placing greater emphasis on supporting Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority confirmed channeling its commitment and efforts towards a social dialogue, particularly with regard to the rights and minimum wage for kindergarten staff, as confirmed by the Prime Minister Dr. Salam Fayyad, asserting that the activities of the Global Action Week for Education contributed to the vast mobilization of media focus on the early childhood sector, on the need of institutionalizing the rights of children’s in addition to raising the budgets allocated to early childhood education and care. The outcomes as stated below were a clear indication that the GCE and GAW activities succeeded in delivering powerful messages to Palestinian government officials.

GCE Outcomes

1. Increased awareness locally and nationally of the importance of early childhood as a critical period in children’s development (holistically and academically)
2. Lobbying and advocating for government to prioritize early childhood care and education on their policy agenda as a right and an integral part of children’s rights as confirmed by Jomtien and International Human Rights Declaration and Laws

3. The Palestinian Authority confirmed channeling its commitment and efforts towards a social dialogue, particularly with regard to the rights and minimum wage for kindergarten staff

4. The GCE and GAW contributed to the vast mobilization of media focus on the early childhood sector and on the need of institutionalizing the rights of children’s in addition to raising the budgets allocated to early childhood education and care

5. Strengthening social, educational and private sector interaction, dialogue and solidarity between all the local, national, regional and political circles for and in education