

Pinwheels Project at Al-Isawiya Girls School  
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On May 10, 2016, I headed to Al-Esawyieh Girls School to introduce the Pinwheels for Peace project to the schools' 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The school is located in the East Jerusalem village of Al Isawiya, near Mt. Scopus and it is surrounded by two Israeli settlements. Al-Isawiya Village is continuously subjected to nightly raiding, harassments, executions, and detention of children and Israeli soldiers often set-up checkpoints blocking the villages' main entrances. Despite all that, I still decided to introduce the Pinwheels for Peace project at the school, hoping to encourage the students to think and dream of peace.

The Pinwheels for Peace Project asks the students themselves to dream of and define peace by simply expressing what peace means to them through a drawing on a piece of paper. Then the students are asked to cut the paper from multiple angles to make it into a pinwheel.

This simple activity was a personal challenge for me. I wondered how to bring this peace project to a group of 11 year olds who are experiencing so much hardship in their lives. Many have lost a family member, experienced the arrest of a sibling or even witnessed a night raid or a clash between the Israeli soldiers and some residents of the village. This was not an easy task.

As nervous as I was, it turned out to be a successful activity and the students' interaction was very satisfying. First, I started by explaining the goal of the Pinwheels Peace Project, its mechanism and its results. The idea behind the project is to encourage the students to imagine peace by expressing their needs and dreams for the future. The Pinwheel project is more about helping each child to have some inner peace and dream about their personal wishes despite the daily struggle they face.

In our discussion, the students' wishes varied. Some wished for the release of the martyrs' bodies (the Israeli army is withholding the bodies of people killed by soldiers), some wished for an end to the daily clashes, others wished to end the Israeli occupation. Some wished for human rights, for more rights for children, for freedom of movement, freedom of expression. Many wished for the right to raise the Palestinian flag in Jerusalem without the fear of getting arrested or shot at. I was surprised when these little girls explained how one can recognize the difference between a rubber bullet and live fire, just by the sound.

The students' drawings expressing peace were very touching. They drew doves flying, the Al-Aqsa mosque, roads without check-points, the Palestinian flag, a house with trees and

rainbows. They included many other symbols of childhood and innocent dreams. Once they created their pinwheel, each student presented her it to the class and talked about her dreams for her future.

All the Pinwheels that the students' drew addressed one common issue: They want the night raids of their village to stop. I feel this is a problem that is greatly affecting the students' physical and physiological wellbeing.

Hopefully through the Pinwheels for Peace Project, children in Palestine can hold on to their dreams of peace and hope. May they realize their dreams of a liberated country free of any occupying force.

Amen to that.