



Give chance to 1,000 deprived children in Palestine to see theatre at ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival

The Aim

To create a platform for young people to interact and grow.

What is ASHTAR?

ASHTAR is a non-profit theatre organisation based in Palestine. It was founded in 1991, with the aim of training young Palestinians (aged between 14-18) in theatre skills over the course of a four-year program. ASHTAR is a strong advocate for the right of culture for everyone. We see theatre as a powerful tool that can introduce new ideas and perspectives for socio-political change.

So, what is ATiYF?

ATiYF stands for ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival. It is organised every other year by the graduates of ASHTAR for local and international theatre students to participate in a joined artistic experience. This year's theme is ASCENCION.

80 to 100 students study at ASHTAR every year. This year, we are the 16th graduating class, a group of 10 students from Ramallah organising the festival. The festival reaches out over 10 days to 5000 people spread across different cities in the West Bank, with workshops, performances and parades.

The objectives of the festival are:

- to create cultural bridges between young people from different parts of the world, who have an essential role in the struggle for a more just world
- to foment solidarity and combat racism, marginalisation and stereotypes of Palestine and Palestinians
- to explore what it means to ascend in talent, skills or even to rise above or overcome life obstacles.

The festival will be held in Ramallah, Palestine from July 20th till July 30th. It takes the form of a camp-fest, which means that all the attendants live together throughout the ten days of the festival.

Why should you donate?

ASHTAR theatre is a non-profit organisation, which means that any contribution or donation that you make will only be used for funding our project. We aim to reach marginalised areas and peoples who cannot afford to pay to attend theatre performances, such as the Bedouin communities, small villages in rural areas and the refugee camps. Every donation thus brings us closer to a population deprived of access to culture.

For us as the graduating class, we are learning how to organise an international event, giving us essential life skills. All participants will benefit from building new skills and living new experiences: theatre allows students to find creative means of expressing themselves, fomenting personal growth and developing skills that have a positive impact in many areas of their lives. Confidence in oneself and abilities, analytical capacity, teamwork and teambuilding, critical thinking.

We consider the festival to have an essential mission particularly in the current political climate. Theatre is a strong method of peaceful resistance against oppression and occupation, allowing us to find creative solutions to political dead-ends. Different perspectives and approaches to dealing with an extremely difficult political context are fomented.

Since the festival begun, it has welcomed groups from Europe (France, Belgium, UK, Greece, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Germany), from the Middle East (Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt) and from North America (US). Dozens of plays have been performed.

ATiYF Festival thus gathers youths from many corners of the globe. This means that:

- Young people from different countries get to interact with other cultures, broadening their horizons and perspectives
- Young people from outside Palestine get to see the side of the conflict rarely portrayed, moving beyond the deceiving lens of the global media.

What are your donation options?

Your donation will contribute to the costs of:

- Renting the performance and workshop spaces
- Renting technical equipment for the performances across the West Bank
- Local transportation for marginalized children to come to the theatre and see performances.

This festival will be held in Ramallah, Palestine from July 20th till July 30th, in the form of a Camp-Fest, where all attendants will be living together throughout the 10 days. The festival will include workshops given by local and international trainers to build new skills and bring new experiences to each participant, that will culminate in a final performance. The festival will also include performances prepared by the different participating international and local groups.

A personal Note

Zein Al-Mini

I started theatre in seventh grade with the support of my mum. She saw that my personality was weak, I struggled to express my feelings and I was afraid of saying my opinion out loud. I didn't know how to defend myself. I had talents, I used to sing, draw, paint and sometimes I used to act and impersonate characters or people, to do role plays, and then I started to have passion for theatre and acting. Ever since, the idea of theatre has been in my head. I had the opportunity to register in ASHTAR Theatre. I went home and found that my mum had called and enrolled me at ASHTAR. When I started first year, I was informed by the theatre that we would do an international festival and that we would have a student exchange and do plays. I was very enthusiastic and dedicated to the training. I invested all my energy, potential and dedication to the training. As soon as we finished our first year, we did a competition in Jericho in improvisation theatre. At first, I was afraid when I went on stage and saw the audience, but when I got on stage I dedicated my energy to the work we were doing and it turned out fine, unlike what I thought it would be like.

Now I can say that I am a student in theatre, like others say that they are students in ballet or drawing. I am so proud of myself for doing something with my life, like them. My first play with ASHTAR was in my second year, called 'Court'. I wasn't the main character, but I was so proud of being in a play. I learnt that even if you don't have a main role, you can shine and move the audience. I also learnt many different theatre skills, like sound, speaking, moving etc. I learnt that I can be any character I want to be, like a politician, a maid, or a chef. You can be any character you dream to be.

In the fourth year, my personality became more and more stronger. I am no longer the person I used to be, I can now speak my mind in front of people. I broke a lot of walls within myself, I'm not afraid of people anymore. I am stronger, I can say my ideas without caring who is listening to me. My voice became stronger and louder now, I am a fully-realised person now. We made a play called 'The Lower Depths'. This was my most productive year, I exceeded my expectations and I worked really hard. I didn't forget my script.

As a result of this hard work, another student and myself got a scholarship to go to Norway. It was a new experience because it was in English, I was responsible for myself. I spent 16 days without my family, this motivated me to excel and take full responsibility for my actions and to prove myself. It was an extremely character-building experience and I came out much stronger.

Now we are working on the youth festival which is a very big thing because it is a new experience, we are organising it by ourselves despite being only 16 years old.