



ABOUT US

The Freedom Theatre is a community-based theatre and cultural centre in Jenin Refugee Camp. Convinced that the arts have a crucial role to play in building a free and healthy society, The Freedom Theatre is developing a vibrant and creative artistic community in the northern part of the West Bank. The Freedom Theatre offers a unique programme of activities in performing arts and multimedia, including professional acting training and production, community outreach such as playback theatre and psychodrama, stage, light and sound design for theatre, filmmaking, photography and creative writing.

OUR MISSION

- Raise the quality of performing arts and cinema in the area;
- Offer a space in which children and youth can act, create and express themselves freely, imagining new realities and challenging existing social and cultural barriers;
- Empower the young generation to use the arts to promote positive change in their community;
- Break the cultural isolation that separates Jenin from the wider Palestinian and global communities.

BACKGROUND

JENIN REFUGEE CAMP

One of the greatest tragedies of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory is its consequences for children and youth, the most innocent and vulnerable part of society. Children are affected by the occupation and ensuing fragmentation of society in a number of ways, and there are very few means of protection, release and rehabilitation available to them.

Jenin Refugee Camp has been among the areas most severely affected, particularly since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000. Today the home of around 16,000 Palestinian refugees, the camp continues to be

subject to violence and aggression by the Israeli army. Children in the area grow up amidst a seemingly endless cycle of violence and oppression, and many children suffer from depression, chronic fear and trauma.

ARNA MER KHAMIS

The Freedom Theatre draws its inspiration from a unique project, *Care and Learning*, which used theatre and art to address the chronic fear, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by children in Jenin Refugee Camp. Set up during the first Intifada the project was run by Arna Mer Khamis, an Israeli citizen who devoted her life to campaigning for freedom and human rights, particularly in Occupied Palestine.

The fierce and energetic humanity of this woman, who was born to a Jewish family and who had chosen to live and work among the Palestinians, challenged the children with possibilities for an alternative reality. Arna won the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize', in 1993 for her "...passionate commitment to the defense and education of the children of Palestine". With the award money she built The Stone Theatre, which was later destroyed in the Israeli invasion of the refugee camp in 2002.

JULIANO MER KHAMIS

Care and Learning is documented in the film *Arna's Children*, directed by Arna's son, the late Juliano Mer Khamis. *Arna's Children* is a searing portrayal of how a military occupation destroys childhood. It is also a compassionate and complex portrait of Palestinian resistance, looking closely at both the cultures of violence and *sumoud*, steadfastness that arise in the wake of occupation. It is amid this destruction and hopelessness that Juliano captured some of the most haunting footage, tracking the paths of his mother's former students, young Palestinian men imprisoned in ghettos within ghettos.

Together with one of Arna's former students, Zakaria Zubeidi, and Swedish pediatric nurse Jonatan Stanczak, Juliano Mer Khamis established The Freedom Theatre in 2006.

Juliano directed The Freedom Theatre and managed in a unique way to relay the idea of "Freedom through Art" to both a local and international audience until April 2011 when he was assassinated by an unknown enemy of culture and freedom of expression. The theatre's staff, members and friends are committed to honouring and building upon the legacy of Arna and Juliano.

ACTIVITIES

The Freedom Theatre is committed to developing a holistic programme of theatre and multimedia activities, aiming to cover every aspect of the arts, from the therapeutic, playful and educational, to professional training and artistic productions. Our activities mainly target children, youth and adults in Jenin Refugee Camp, Jenin City and surrounding villages.

THEATRE PROGRAMME

This programme contains a range of activities that introduce the young generation to theatre and drama, providing them with important tools for dealing with the hardships of daily life under occupation. At the same time, The Freedom Theatre runs a professional Acting School, with the aim of building up long-term capacity in the field by developing a cadre of young theatre professionals, actors and drama instructors.

Acting School

In 2008 The Freedom Theatre launched the first Acting School in the northern part of Occupied Palestine - a three-year professional training programme for young adults. The school aims to foster a new generation of theatre professionals who are open to exploring innovative artistic strands in the field, while also using the arts as an important tool for positive social change in their community. For more information, please visit the [Acting School website](#)

Productions

By staging innovative, fresh, exhilarating productions, The Freedom Theatre is contributing to a transformation of the arts scene in the region. Theatre productions comment on important social and political issues in the community, while at the same time exploring artistic trends which are previously unseen in the area.

Recent in-house productions include *Sho Kman* (What Else), *While Waiting* – an adaptation of *Waiting for Godot*, *Fragments of Palestine*, *Men in the Sun* and an adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*. Upcoming productions include a children's play, a Street Theatre performance, a puppet show and a stand-up comedy show.

Another upcoming production is *The Freedom Bus*, a nine-day playback event that will take place in late September 2012. Inspired by the Freedom Riders of the American Civil Rights Movement and the recent West Bank Freedom Riders, an ensemble of Palestinian actors and musicians will to the key sites of oppression and resistance within the West Bank of occupied Palestine, listening to and enacting the experiences of community members.

Please visit The Freedom Theatre's Youtube channel for videos of current productions and more.

Drama workshops

Through drama workshops for children and youth The Freedom Theatre introduces the young generation in Jenin to acting and theatre. The workshops offer a space in which young girls and boys can express themselves freely and explore their creativity.

Playback Theatre

Playback Theatre is an interactive theatre approach used in over 50 countries as a tool for community building and trauma recovery. In a Playback Theatre performance, audience members share personal stories and then watch as a team of actors and musicians transform these accounts into improvised theater pieces.

Psychodrama

The Trauma Response Project address the need for individual and collective trauma recovery by using arts-based methods, experiential psychotherapy and other approaches to stimulate psychosocial resilience, community cohesion and identity health.

Street Theatre

In collaboration with Centro de Criação para o Teatro e Artes de Rua, Portugal a performance will be created together with the local community of Jenin Refugee Camp, with the aim of bringing theatre into the streets involving the residents both in the process of creating and performing a production. The production will be performed in the city of Guimarães in Portugal, the European Cultural Capital for 2012.

Performances and Screenings

The Freedom Theatre hosts performances by other theatres and performing arts ensembles from Palestine and abroad. Shows include theatre, music, dance and circus. In addition, The Freedom Theatre regularly offers film screenings in its theatre hall.

MULTIMEDIA PROGRAMME

Through wide-ranging activities within the field of multimedia, The Freedom Theatre aims to encourage the young generation of Jenin to explore new forms of creative self-expression through film, photography and creative writing. More intensive training is also offered to trainees who develop skills in teaching other youth, thereby instilling in the participants a strong sense of empowerment and responsibility towards their community.

Filmmaking

Through our filmmaking workshops young boys and girls are given the opportunity to develop new skills in all aspects of filmmaking. Students produce their own short films, which are presented to the community and available on The Freedom Theatre's various media outlets.

Creative Writing

Participants receive training in a variety of issues related to journalism and creative writing, exploring their own imagination and ability to

translate experiences and observations into different forms of text. The participants compose articles, poetry, essays, short stories and other pieces that are included in The Freedom Theatre's youth magazine, *Voices*, which is distributed throughout the local community and made available on the youth website www.voices.ps

Photography

The photography courses put an emphasis on storytelling and self-expression through pictures. Participants produce their own exhibitions, in addition to working with the Creative Writing groups to prepare complementary photos for each issue of the youth magazine *Voices*.

IMPACT

EMPOWERING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS

The young generation of Jenin Refugee Camp, having grown up amidst a violent military occupation, continues to struggle with ongoing fears, depression and trauma. At the same time, few opportunities exist for people in the area to find positive outlets for their emotions that can allow them to develop a healthy and meaningful sense of themselves and their surroundings.

The Freedom Theatre offers children, youth and adults in the Jenin area a safe space in which they are free to express themselves and explore their creativity through culture and arts. By participating in the theatre's drama and multimedia activities, the young generation is able to develop the skills, self-knowledge and confidence that will allow them to challenge present realities and build a better future for themselves and for their society.

PROMOTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Freedom Theatre's activities create opportunities for particularly young female residents of the area to use theatre and multimedia as tools to explore and address core democratic values. The participants produce their own materials, on themes that are never prescribed but rather developed naturally as a result of their personal and shared experiences, allowing for a wide range of issues to be communicated to their community as well as to the world. The children, youth and adults engaged in The Freedom Theatre are thereby given the opportunity to exercise their freedom of expression - a basic human right and a major requirement for a democratic, open and tolerant society.

Although the themes span a wide field, a common denominator for The Freedom Theatre's activities, productions and materials is their focus on critical thinking and pluralism. Participants are exposed to a diversity of voices and opinions, and are encouraged to reflect, discuss and challenge present realities.

BREAKING CULTURAL ISOLATION

Jenin Refugee Camp has had no theatre or cinema facilities for many years and has been effectively cut off from both local and global cultural developments. The Freedom Theatre aims to address the cultural isolation that runs deep within the camp and its surroundings by creating opportunities for communication and interaction with the wider Palestinian community and abroad.

CREATING CHANGE

It is The Freedom Theatre's conviction that the benefits of cultural activities go far beyond the individual. Theatre and other cultural expressions have great potential to stimulate communication and cooperation, to build leadership and to deconstruct social barriers to equal access and opportunity. Encouraging the arts as a source of creativity therefore addresses a critical, but often neglected aspect of poverty – giving voice to the voiceless and enriching the human spirit.

Both for artists and audience, the creative process consists of imagining alternatives, rearranging reality, encouraging curiosity and challenging taboos. In societies that reward obedience over initiative and following rules over experimentation, this is radical. In theatre it can also be magical.

SUPPORTERS

The Freedom Theatre is currently supported by the following main donors:

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
MDG Achievement Fund
Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)
Annenberg Foundation
Ford Foundation
Swiss Consulate
Medico International
Kinderpostzegels

LINKS

Website: www.thefreedomtheatre.org

Blog: thefreedomtheatre.wordpress.com

Youtube Channel:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?blend=1&ob=0>

Video presentation of The Freedom Theatre:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?feature=g-all-u#p/u/6/dvK47dFI07Y>

Video presentation of Drama Therapy workshops:

http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?feature=g-all-u#p/u/0/jJx0Sr5I_Y

Video presentation of Playback Theatre programme:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?feature=g-all-u#p/u/30/yyBljq6aGml>

Video presentation of the production Alice in Wonderland:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?feature=g-all-u#p/u/1/PoqjVwl0j0Q>

Video presentation of a photography project, Pictures and Stories:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thefreedomtheatre?blend=1&ob=0#p/u/24/N6lo5mPu560>