



Information for Organizers Ibd़aa Dance Tour – 2005

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Sponsored by:

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Ibdaa Cultural Center and Dheisheh Refugee Camp

Dheisheh Refugee Camp

Dheisheh refugee camp, located near the city of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, is one of the 59 Palestinian refugee camps established after the expulsion and flight of more than 750,000 Palestinians following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The 10,000 registered refugees who live crowded together in Dheisheh refugee camp and nearby neighborhoods exemplify the plight of the five million Palestinian refugees who remain dispersed around the world. Military violence, poverty, unemployment, severe overcrowding and water shortages that threaten health and hygiene are standard living conditions in Dheisheh. Cramped, concrete houses are separated by garbage and sewage-filled alleyways. With no playgrounds, parks or other public spaces, children have nowhere to play but in the narrow streets.

Since September 2000, the Palestinian struggle to end 37 years of Israeli occupation has been met with unprecedented levels of military violence. Using US-manufactured attack helicopters and tanks, the Israeli military has shelled Palestinian communities, destroying homes and killing thousands of people.

Those hardest hit by today's deepening poverty and military violence are the children, who make up more than 50% of Dheisheh's population. Often schools are closed due to curfews or closures leaving the children isolated from their peers and playmates. Severe human rights abuses, political instability and violence have deprived Palestinian refugee children of the simple pleasure of childhood. Every child in Dheisheh has been traumatized, as has every child in Palestine, by military invasions into their community, house raids in the dead of night, arrests and assassinations of family members and friends.

Ibdaa Cultural Center

Ibdaa, which means 'to create something out of nothing', is a grassroots organization that provides social, educational, and cultural programs for the children, youth and women of Dheisheh refugee camp. Ibdaa started out in 1994 as a cultural exchange project where 30 children from Dheisheh traveled to Paris and presented a dance performance that expressed the plight of Palestinian refugees. Following the success of the tour, Ibdaa began various youth empowerment programs, and rapidly grew into a multi-program institution as its programs flexibly and innovatively addressed needs in the community. Today, Ibdaa serves over 1,500 children, youth and women. It provides income to over 60 families in the camp through employment and handicraft income-generating projects.

Ibdaa works to empower the children and enable them to share their experiences with each other and with the international community through art, dance, music, and internet communication. Ibdaa provides extracurricular programs to the children and youth afterschool, on weekends, and during winter and summer breaks. Its programs provide opportunities that would not otherwise be available in the camp.

Despite a tradition of gender segregation in Palestinian society, Ibdaa's organizers are determined to provide a progressive environment for Palestinian children by bringing girls and boys together in an open setting of joy and learning. Ibdaa offers dance, music, art and creative writing programs; sports teams; international cultural exchange opportunities; leadership training for girls; an oral history project with elderly Palestinians; mental health counseling services for children; language courses; community organizing workshops for teens; a human rights lecture series; a children's library, a nursery and the camp's only mixed-gender kindergarten. Ibdaa also provides a community space where women can form support networks, develop their skills and take an active role in their community and in Palestinian society at large.

Ibdaa has become one of the most successful, active and popular grassroots institutions in Palestine. Ibdaa has been a place where effective community organizing has been taking place – particularly after the *Intifada* started, it has played a crucial role for the community's survival and vitalization, by organizing events, projects, and emergency activities.

About the Ibdaa Dance Troupe

The Ibdaa Dance Troupe consists of 20 youth (ages 14-16) from Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. One of the most distinctive features of the dance troupe is the continuous learning process carried out by generations of youth. These dancers are the fourth generation of Ibdaa dancers and have been trained by older experienced dancers in the camp. The first generation of dancers came together in 1994 as part of a youth cultural exchange with France and for the past ten years the Ibdaa Dance Troupe has been touring throughout Europe, the Middle East and the US.

Through traditional folkloric dance (*debka*) and theatrical choreography, the troupe performs three shows depicting Palestinian refugees' history and aspirations that they perform for local and international audiences. *Al Khaima*, (the Tent) depicts the life of the Palestinian refugee before 1948, during the *Nakba*, (or The Catastrophe, referring to the expulsion and flight of 750,000 Palestinians preceding the founding of the State of Israel) up until the recent *Intifada*. *Al Wasiya* (the Will) explores the life of the refugee in different historic stages, through the Palestinian ancestors giving their will to the next generations to hold on to their love of the land. *Mu'takhal* (Political Prisoners) shows the

tragedy of the political prisoner, tying it into the current political suffering of the Palestinian people.

The Dance Pieces

As mentioned above, the Ibdaa dance troupe performs three pieces accompanied by songs and speeches at the end. Here is a more detailed description of each of the pieces:

***Al Khaima* – 25 minutes**

This piece depicts the history and aspiration of Palestinian refugees. It begins with the life in the pre-1948 villages of Palestine including traditions, harvest celebrations and weddings. The piece then shifts to *Al-Nakba*, the occupation and the *Intifada*. It ends with *Mautini* (the Arab national anthem). There are children's speeches (English and Arabic – 5 minutes) that can be inserted between the dance and *Mautini*.

***Al Wasiya* – 2 versions possible – 30 or 35 minutes**

This piece is a story of farmers from pre-1948 Palestine. It describes the relationship between the land and its people and a dying farmer's will to the future generation – to cherish and defend their lands. The *debka* steps in this piece are much more complex and intricate than those in *Al Khaima* and they are performed with a medley of Palestinian folkloric songs.

***Mu'takhal* – 15 minutes**

This piece is a theatrical performance about the daily reality in occupied Palestine – imprisonment. This striking piece depicts the ongoing struggle in the society where the nearly 40% of the male population has experienced multiple imprisonments and/or detentions in Israeli jails.

Songs

The dancers sing *Mautini* (at the end of *Al Khaima*), *Mithl* (The Wheat) and *Sarha* (The Cry).

English translations of the songs can be emailed to you, please email josie@mecaforpeace.org

The program is flexible. You can have intermissions, intersperse the songs and speeches. However, a fundraising pitch must be scheduled in at each performance.

About the Tour

The tour should serve as an educational opportunity for communities across the US to learn about Palestinian refugees and their struggle for self-determination and the Right of Return. It should also be an opportunity to challenge the negative stereotypes of Arab people by presenting the beautiful traditions of Palestinian culture and by having audiences interact with these articulate, thoughtful and inspiring youth.

The tour is also an opportunity for Ibdaa's young people to network and build connections with members of the international community as well as to fundraise for the programs at Ibdaa Cultural Center. The money raised for the tour will allow Ibdaa to continue providing services to the children, youth and women in Dheisheh refugee camp. Ibdaa's activities include a computer/internet center, a community hall, a women's embroidery cooperative, a kindergarten and nursery, a children's library, a youth media training project, sports teams, and a community restaurant.

For more information about Ibdaa please visit www.dheisheh-ibdaa.net or email ibdaa94@yahoo.com

For Campus Organizers

College and university campuses have unique opportunities for fundraising to support the tour. Sources of sponsorship include campus arts foundations, departments of Drama and Art, Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science and History departments. At most universities, departments and arts organizations reserve portions of their budgets to host speakers and performers from around the world.

We are asking campuses to take the lead in covering expenses for the tour as a whole. This includes raising sufficient funds to support the costs for the dance troupe to travel to and within the United States. For each campus hosting a show this is at least \$5,000. Some campuses will be raising as much as \$8,000.

By covering the cost of the tour, campuses ensure that all donations and ticket sales will go to contribute to the completion of the health center. The dancers work hard on this tour to raise money for their community. While students have less money to personally donate than working people, they can contribute substantially by harnessing university resources. If between 5 and 8 departments or student groups agree to co-sponsor for \$1000 each, the costs will be covered. The campus community will benefit tremendously from the performance as well as direct dialog with youth from the camp.

Logistics

Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA) will be responsible for arranging all flights (from/to Palestine and within the US). MECA will also function as the key

communicator with Ibdaa, produce tour T-shirts to be sold at all events, and will oversee the logistics by coordinating with each city. MECA is available to assist in publicity material (we have many photos of the dancers to share and a graphics designer if you would like us to design a poster for you). We will also send out basic program information to be included in the programs each city distributes.

The group will consist of approximately 25 people:

20 Ibdaa dancers (both girls and boys, breakdown still unknown)

2-3 Ibdaa tour leaders (at least one of the co-directors of Ibdaa Cultural Center and older dancers from previous generations of the Ibdaa dance troupe)

1-2 MECA staff depending on the availability of Ibdaa staff

As the organizer, you will be responsible for arranging, paying for and accompanying the entire visit of Ibdaa to and in your city.

Transportation:

The group will need transportation to/from the airport, to/from the venue(s), to/from their accommodation and everything in between. People in the 2003 tour either rented a bus or several passenger vans.

We will expect someone from the local organizing team to be with us during transportation to ensure we do not get lost.

Accommodations:

The group cannot be split up. In the past, we have sometimes stayed with multiple families but this caused unnecessary complications with driving, logistics, and supervision. Please arrange for the entire group to stay in one location or to be split up with boys in one place and girls in another. We recommend a cheap but clean motel located either near the venue or near a downtown area, it's your call what is more important. If the group will be housed at one place or in a hotel the boys and girls need separate rooms; we will inform you in advance of the number breakdowns.

Food:

The group members are Muslims and do not eat pork (this includes pepperoni and many sausages, please check!). Ideally, they prefer Arabic food. They also generally like hamburgers, French fries, and grilled chicken. Again, when it is nearer to the time of the tour we will give you more specific information on their preferences. Many local restaurants, bakeries and families have been willing to donate food on past tours which cut down on costs.

Venues and Stage Requirements:

The Ibdaa Dance Troupe performs 3 pieces with songs and speeches. We need a sizable stage with basic sound and light systems. The group should be at the venue at least 2 hours in advance for warm up, rehearsal, light and sound check, and to set up the lobby.

Stage Size:

Width: 40+ feet

Depth: 34+ feet

Sound:

We need a sound system with a CD player.

Microphones:

We need multiple microphones. One for an emcee (opening, fundraiser pitch, and closing); one handheld mic for the dancer's speech(es); several microphones on stands placed among the group when they sing at the end of the performance.

Lights:

We need a light system that can do basic light effects (spot lights, flashing, dimming, colors, etc.)

Backstage/Dressing Rooms:

The dancers need access to at least two dressing rooms or closed-in area in the backstage for costume changes during the performance. Ideally, the dressing rooms are accessible from both ends of the stage.

Provisions for the Dancers:

You need to provide plenty of drinking water and snacks for their time at the performance hall. There should also be towels (they sweat a lot from dancing!)

Lobby:

There should be enough space to set up tables for merchandise sales and brochures. The dancers and chaperones from Ibdaa will bring over Palestinian embroidery (*tatriz*) from the Ibdaa Women's Cooperative in Dheisheh and as mentioned above, MECA will print tour t-shirts (proceeds go to Ibdaa).

Publicity and Outreach:

Good publicity is the key to a successful tour. It is critical to get local media (radio, TV and newspapers) to mention Ibdaa. An endorsement by a local celebrity may help generate media interest. The children and leaders are also available for interviews and press conferences before and during their visit.

Ibdaa has now done two national tours and received quite a bit of media attention. See if you can find local reporters that covered them in the past.

MECA will prepare a press packet which we will give to all tour organizers. This will include information about the tour, Ibdaa Cultural Center, Dheisheh refugee camp, etc.

MECA also has video tapes of "The Children of Ibdaa: To Create Something Out of Nothing," a 30 minute documentary about the second generation of the Ibdaa dance troupe. You should receive a free copy of this film from the Stanford

students. If you did not receive one and would like to please contact josie@mecaforpeace.org and we will send you one. The film will give you a better sense of Ibdaa and the dance troupe and can also be used later on for fundraising and generating interest before Ibdaa comes.

Accompaniment:

The dance group will need someone from your city to act as our liaison, to introduce the dancers to people in the local community when we go to any activities/events/houses. Someone also needs to be with the group as they drive around to be our navigator and guide.

Staffing and Volunteers:

Organizing a performance tour is a large task and will require a lot of people power. Please be sure you will have enough help for outreach, logistics at venues, helping out on the day of the performance (ushers, ticket takers, tabling, etc) and many other things that the group will need.

Activities:

It is extremely beneficial for the Ibdaa dancers to meet as many community members as possible during their visit to build solidarity, start an exchange with their American counterparts, and meet with future supporters. Please try to organize visits to local schools (the dancers will be high school students) and activities with community groups where they can interact with youth, Arab community members and average Americans.

We would also like to have activities planned that they cannot enjoy in Palestine. Things like amusement parks, ice skating/sledding, beaches, movies, cultural performances and sight seeing. The dancers love outdoor activities like picnics and barbeques. In Minnesota, they had a large picnic and went jetskiing. Lightly structured activities with other youth and community members are ideal. It's also nice to give them a sense of the city they are in with quick visits to monuments and museums.

Language:

Most of the dancers speak English well and so do the leaders. However, it would still be very helpful to have Arabic speakers in your team of organizers.

Gifts and Donations:

Many people on past tours have been very moved by the performance and have been compelled to hand gifts and/or money directly to the dancers. While those generous gestures are greatly appreciated, Ibdaa's leaders prefer that any gifts be given to the organization in order to benefit the larger community rather than only members of this group. It also helps to avoid unnecessary jealousy from and gaps between other people in the camp when they return. It will be important that the organizers discuss with Ibdaa's leaders about the gift-giving policies when they arrive in your city.

