

Statement by Mohamad Rabah

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Palestinian Circus School

On the 3rd of October, 2022, the Israeli Military Occupation assassinated Salameh Rafat and two of his friends near Al Jalazon Refugee Camp. Salameh is the son of our colleague at the Palestinian Circus School (PCS), and he was also a student at the PCS few years ago. Two weeks ago a Palestinian child in a small village near Bethlehem died from fear. The heart of the 7 year old, "Rayan," stopped out of fear while he was trying to escape from the Israeli soldiers on his way home from school. Salameh and Rayan are not an exceptional stories that you hear on the news once in a while. Every day in Palestine; we have new victims suffering from the occupation brutality.

At the PCS, despite all the challenges, we still manage to provide weekly circus trainings for around 400 children and youth, and we organized more than 50 circus shows for public. Managing all these activities is doable and achievable. What can be really challenging to do and achieve is to give hope for children and youth, to make them believe in themselves and in the humanity again, to allow them to dream of the basic human rights, and to imagine justice. This what really matters for children and youth, at every part of our world.

ORIGINAL KEYNOTE DESCRIPTION

Playing to Protect; Protecting to Play

In Palestine, young people and children live with little hope and few of them can see any light at the end of the tunnel, after 74 years of endless brutality of a military occupation that controls every aspect of their lives; what they can buy and sell, what they work; who they can love and who they can't; what they can eat; when they can travel or move from one place to another. What makes things even worse for young people and children is the corrupt and undemocratic Palestinian leaders and the agreement between the super powerful countries to keep the injustice status quo as it is.

From my personal experience as a young person who lived in this reality and as youth worker, who used role-playing as a tool since more than 10 years, and using social circus as a tool for 4 years, I can argue that different forms of playing can be a powerful tool to protect young people and children from choices out of anger and self-harm toward themselves and toward others. The other side of this exploration is: how young people are able to discover new participatory and inclusive approaches they are not used to it? Are we going to focus on protecting them, or protecting our play?

Mohamad Rabah is the Executive Director for the Palestinian Circus School and co-founder of the Palestinian role-playing organization Bait Byout. He is a youth work specialist with a Master's degree in Community and Youth Work from Durham University, United Kingdom. Mohamad's professional expertise cover community and youth policy and practice; professional and personal development of young people; management in community settings; research in professional practice; and using non-formal learning tools such as circus and role-playing games to support the development of communities and young people.