"We are like an olive tree, with its roots deeply rooted in the ground, and branches that reach out to the world. Our words produce more than sound, they walk tall to the four corners of earth. For some, the day to day activities are only part of the job, but here-it is a commitment to serve and enrich the community relationships to be an integral part of the future and change."

- Zoughbi Zoughbi
Wi'am is a grass-roots organization that has been in operation since 1995. At its inception it was a place for conflict transformation and mediation. Now Wi'am is not only a place of conflict transformation but a center for community and peace building. We strive to build a culture of nonviolence in Bethlehem through workshops, mediation, human rights advocacy, counseling, and campaigns. It is also our hope to build a society that is nonviolently active against fighting injustice and is politically and socially aware.
Our Logo

- The star represents the city and community of Bethlehem. It has been a symbol of this region from early the Christian era, and is today the official seal of the Bethlehem municipality.

- The hands clasped together represents the act and spirit of reconciliation—instead of separate fists, which are the instruments of conflict.

- The rays of light represent both the genuine struggle in non-violent reconciliation, and the enlightenment that comes with learning peaceful methods of conflict resolution.
Life in Bethlehem: The Context We Work In:

- Lack of Land
- Restricted Movement
- Crumbling Economy and Infrastructure
- Insecurity and Instability
- Unknown Future
Lack of Land

- Surrounding Bethlehem are Settlements which continue to suffocate the city and take land away from Palestinians.
- The Wall dips into Bethlehem, surrounding Rachel’s tomb, which was once a major tourist attraction, ripping away olive groves, and isolating families and communities.
Restricted Movement

- **Checkpoints** monitor and restrict our movement. These checkpoints not only exist along the green line, they are present throughout the West Bank, currently there are over 63 checkpoints within the West Bank (Nov 07).

- **Road blocks** are also issued in the West Bank to prevent passage on certain roads deemed only for Israelis and Internationals.
Restricted Movements

- **Closures** also restrict the movement of Palestinians. Although many Palestinians used to work in Jerusalem where they could receive higher wages, it is now closed, and only Palestinians with permits can cross. This not only has devastating economic effects, it also divides families. In the event of a Jewish holiday or escalation of violence a complete closure is implemented, not even allowing those with permits to enter.
Insecurity and Instability

- Many Palestinians experience violence and abuse at checkpoints.
- Israeli soldiers frequently enter Bethlehem, arresting people without warrants and terrorizing the entire community with sound bombs, tear gas, and gunfire.

Photo from B’Tselem
Crumbling Economy and Infrastructure

- Bethlehem suffers from high unemployment
- When Hamas was elected our civil servants went 15 months without pay, devastating the entire economy
- The tourism industry is still trying to recover from the siege in 2000
- Our hospitals, roads, and government buildings are crumbling, and are unable to provide the needed services
The Israelis control our water, and as a result we have a water crisis every summer. Water from our reservoirs go to keep lush settlements green, while our tanks run dry.
Unknown Future

- The future here is unknown. We are unsure when/if we will have our own state, whether today’s calm will bring tomorrow’s storm, or if we will suddenly all become refugees. The only thing predictable in our future is that it is unpredictable.
Result

- As a result of the pressures on the society, the ground has become tense. Factionalism and tribalism is on the rise, so too is stress related illness. Feelings of hopelessness pervade the society, and emigration is on the rise. The population raised under the culture of violence of the occupation has led to a pressure-cooker situation where conflict escalates very quickly.

...it is in this context we work
Our Work

- Sulha Mediation
- Women’s Department
- Children’s Department
- Youth Department
- Citizen Diplomacy
Sulha Mediation:
Community-Based Mediation
Traditions of Sulha

- Sulha, the traditional Arab method of resolving conflicts, has its historical roots before the dawn of Islam.
- Its historic emergence is in early Semitic writings and in later Christian records dating back to the first century A.D.
- It is typical to the Arab desert culture and literature and has been passing from one generation to another.
- Based on common principles and collective wisdom recognized within pluralistic communities and formed across religions, political and ethnic differences.
- Many of the traditions of Sulha could be traced into the Abrahamic religions.
Sulha at WI’AM

- In the office we have a marriage between the traditional ways of dealing with conflict and the international schools of conflict transformation/resolution.
- Story telling, contextualized proverbs, and sayings lay the basic pillars for a healthy atmosphere which allows parties to have rapprochement.
- Wi’am deploys Sulha as a way to empower the rule of law, complementing it, rather than replacing it.
- The underlying purpose: restoration of peaceful relationships, redressing injustices, and resolving conflicts between individuals, families, neighborhoods different groups, and the local population.
- Wi’am has approximately 350 cases a year
Steps to Sulha

- The first step "hudne" or a truce: Mediators are deployed and get both sides to agree to a truce for a determined period of time. During that time mediators use shuttle diplomacy to listen to both sides of the conflict.

- Second step is "atwe": This is when a leader of one faction goes to the other, ready to satisfy the other’s demands. Some conflict may take a few months to reach this point and while other conflicts such as honor or killings may take 2-3 years.

- The last step is Sulha: This is where both groups meet, shake hands, and lastly drink coffee together. If both sides drink coffee it is a sign of resolution.
Women’s Department

- Civil Training
- Vocational Training
- Counseling
- Advocacy
- Recreational Activities
Civil Training

- Conflict Resolution
- Democracy
- Nonviolence
- Human Rights
- Women’s Rights
- Gender Equality
Vocational Training

- Embroidery
- Pastry
- Olive Soap
- Flower Arranging
- Mosaics
- Beading
- Glass Painting
Advocacy

- Women’s Rights
- Participation in Civil Society
- Operation 1325
- Women in Leadership
Recreational Activities

- Field Trips
- Bingo
- Joint Gatherings
In order for women to be empowered they must also receive healing. Through our workshops women have approached our trainers who have or still live in a violent home, where they or their children are the victims of violence. Therefore we provide counseling to the women and children from violent homes.
Children’s Department

• Educational Activities
• Recreational Activities
• Counseling
• Summer Camp
• Identity Awareness
Educational Activities

- Nonviolent problem solving and conflict resolution
- Child Rights
- Team work
- Gender Equality
- Importance of Volunteering
Recreational Activities

- Crafts
- Games
- Field Trips
Counseling

- 70% of children in our society have been traumatized from living under the conditions of occupation. Our workers have been trained to notice children who have experienced trauma and our center provides trauma counseling and trauma coping skills for these cases.
Summer Camp

- Educational Activities
  - Nonviolence
  - Positive Behavior
  - Environmental Awareness
- Recreational Activities
  - Games
  - Crafts
  - Theatre
  - Swimming
- Field Trips
  - Ramallah
  - Jericho
  - Theme Parks
Identity Awareness

- Dubka Dancing
- Theatre
- Visiting Elderly
- Learning about Palestinian Identity
Youth Department

- Civil Education
- Training for Trainers
- Conferences and Cultural Exchanges
- Volunteer Work
Civil Education

- Democracy
- Conflict Resolution
- Human Rights
- Gender Equality
- Palestinian Identity
- Nonviolence
- Advocacy
Training for Trainers

- Young people have been able to take part in a civic education program which not only educates and provides young people with skills in conflict transformation, mediation, human rights, gender equality, and democratic governance, but also trains them to be able to educate others as well. This training allows the young people to learn and take what they have learnt to their social peer groups, whether in their universities or social clubs.

- Not only does this educate young people about governance and nonviolent conflict resolution, it also promotes the development of both leadership and communication skills.
Conferences and Cultural Exchanges

- Our youth have been able to take part in various conferences and cultural exchanges. These events have taken them to Germany, France, Jordan, Italy, S. Korea, Japan, and Spain, just to name a few.
Volunteer Work

- The youth help lead the various children’s program and help implement the various Wi’am services we provide.
Citizen Diplomacy

- Discussion
- Advocacy
- Tours
- Public Speaking
Discussion, Tours and Advocacy

- Our aim is to encourage more travel to Palestine, organize home stays with Palestinian families, and provide volunteer opportunities with Palestinian NGOs.

- We encourage a dialogue of cultures and religions. Wi'am offers a wide range of programs for groups to meet with Palestinian and Israeli representatives to understand the political situation first hand.

- Our Citizen Diplomacy program allows for internationals to come and be hosted in Palestine and to hear and be a witness to the Palestinian story.
Public Speaking

- Every year members of our staff travel around the world to different conferences to take part in different public speaking opportunities, centered around nonviolence and the occupation.
- Our hope is not only to build awareness but to also build relationships across cultures, breaking down stereotypes.
Conclusion

- Wi'am is committed to meeting the needs of the community, to help the people resolve conflict, restore relationships, and instill a sense of joy.

- It is our hope that some day the tension in the streets and homes will be replaced with laughter, peace, and freedom.