

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme

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Press Release: October 20, 2008

Walls triumph over bridges...conference on siege is a victim of siege

In a shocking turn, the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme found their International Conference, "Siege and Mental Health... Walls vs. Bridges" under siege. The conference was scheduled to be held on 27-28 October in the Gaza strip. However, following one year of planning and preparation, the academic conference has been disrupted by the Israeli Authorities decision to deny admittance to the international conference participants, only two weeks prior the conference. **What better irony to highlight the effects of the siege?**

The conference has been organized to serve as a forum for professional discussion and scientific exchange concerning the impact of the Gaza siege on children, families, and communities and peace-making efforts. The plan is to gather top researchers and academics from around the world to build bridges for dialogue, mutual acknowledgment, and peace. Some 120 participants from universities around the world were scheduled to attend. 25 of them are presenting papers and original research. The main themes of the conference are addressing professional, mental health and human rights matters.

If Israel imposes strict siege on the whole population of Gaza strip for "security reason", as claimed, we wonder, how could such a conference constitute a threat to the Israeli security.

These actions represent a profound blow to the rights of academic freedom, free speech, education, and cultural dialogue"

We view this action as an action to block communication, distort the platform for mutual acknowledgment, understanding, and admitting the suffering of others.

Once again, and unlike what is claimed, Israel – as an occupying power- is proving that it is controlling the Gaza Strip, preventing people from entry or exit.

Despite all the challenges, we are determined that the conference will go ahead. We plan that the internationals will participate in Ramallah with a video link to Gaza for the local participants who are prevented by the Israelis from leaving.

A Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization

جمعية مسجلة تحت رقم 7025

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We affirm that, If Israel can impose siege on our bodies, they cannot besiege our minds and interaction with the outside world. Despite the unjust decision, we have the determination to continue with the conference as planned. We aim to be able to achieve goals of the conference as well as raising awareness about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of siege on the civilian population of Gaza .

We demand the Israeli authorities to change their decision and allow conference participants to enter Gaza.

Finally, we urge our participants, friends, solidarity groups, human rights organizations, and mental health communities, to protest against this decision, denounce it, and expose the ongoing Israeli policies and violations of human rights.

For more information, please contact Husam El-Nounou
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