

FIXING A BROKEN WORLD

How the International Child Art Foundation in Washington DC hopes to make a difference in the lives of children around the world

Previous Arts Olympiad winner, Imana Zahid (age 12) from Morocco.

Children crossing through checkpoints.



Ashfaq Ishaq, Chairman, International Child Art Foundation, tells us a little bit about the charity's activities, while Rebekah Chilcote writes about her recent trip to Palestine's West Bank.

Can the arts fix our broken world? If you were to spend some time with the International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) in Washington DC or visit their website from home or work, you might start believing that the arts are universal and unifying, provided that children have the opportunities to learn, examine, and create art. Founded by an American-Muslim, wife-husband, health policy-economist team in 1997, ICAF is a charity with a mission to nurture the innate creativity and intrinsic empathy of every child on the planet.

ICAF has a range of projects in the Middle East. In January 2010, ICAF organised an international children's panel at the Global Competitiveness Forum in Riyadh. This was the first time in history that children were given an opportunity to address business leaders anywhere in the world. *The Saudi Gazette* reported that the "five talented children stole the show at the fourth Global Competitiveness Forum ... when they shared how they developed independent innovative capabilities, the same qualities experts say are linked to a competitive economy." Similarly, in January and February, ICAF's exhibition, *Children's Masterpieces*, was held at Riyadh's Hewart Art Gallery. The exhibition of works, produced by leading child artists from around the world at the World Children's Festival in Washington DC, was well-received by Saudi art patrons and critics.

From September to December 2010, ICAF will organise the Arts Olympiad in schools in several Middle Eastern countries, ranging from Algeria to Oman. A free global programme, the Arts Olympiad nurtures the creativity of children and will result in a selection of Arab child artists who will represent their countries at the World Children's Festival in June 2011 in Washington DC. Starting in October 2010, ICAF will call for applications from children's performance groups throughout the Middle East to invite selected groups to perform at the World Children's Festival 2011.

By Ashfaq Ishaq

CHILDREN OF HEBRON

International art therapy is my passion. From growing up as a missionary kid in Africa to working with tsunami survivors, I am happiest on foreign soil. I never imagined, however, that I would find myself on a dirt road, in the dead of night, dragging my little American suitcase of art supplies, surrounded by armed soldiers. My descent into Palestine, in the West Bank gave me a small glimpse into the lives of the children who live there: my pounding heart, the checkpoints, guns and confusion. For the children in politically charged Hebron, this is reality.

I arrived in Palestine as an art therapist at the International Child Art Foundation to work with The Palestinian Child Art Centre (PCAC), helping traumatised children. Founded by Samih Abu Zakieh, PCAC offers hundreds of children a chance to escape political violence through art. "When you love someone, you go to the end of love," believes Abu Zakieh. The first time I met the children of Hebron, I cried. "I have come so far to meet you – to give love, to know it," I told them. They crowded around me with smiles and Arabic whispers, their faces covered in bruises; many had black eyes. When I asked them to draw 'The Day I Will Never Forget', they revealed stories of life in a conflict zone. Many children depicted violence: guns, checkpoints, shelling. One child drew his grandfather's peaceful house. On the back, however, was a picture of himself shooting an AK-47. This juxtaposition of war and peace was common in their art.

I will never forget the story of one teenager, Nadira. Through drawing she poured out a deep well of pain. "I like to be alone always," she said. "I dream only in black and white, never in colour. I am sad all the time. I feel my heart, she is tired. My heart, she is breaking. I drew the tic tac toe symbol because in this life I do not know who is the winner and who is the loser. I also drew these butterflies. Butterflies are free to come and go, but I feel like their life will be over soon." She looked at me with overwhelming eyes. "Many things happened to me. I can't talk about them. It is too painful. But when I saw you come in, your smile and face beautiful, I thought, maybe things will be OK. I drew this picture and I feel better now after telling you."

At PCAC, children are offered a chance to find healing and peace even in the midst of violence. Through art, children of war have a voice. Nadira still needs us – the children of Hebron need us – the citizens of the world, to respond, to join them in sounding out a peaceful cry, a vision of art and reconciliation, to help them one day to dream in colour again. Will you join us?

By Rebekah Chilcote

You can download ICAF's *ChildArt* magazine issue on Co-creation and Innovation free-of-charge at www.icaf.org/whatwedo/childart.html
Your child can participate in the Arts Olympiad, a free global art and sport programme at www.icaf.org/whatwedo/artsolympiad.html
Your family can participate in the World Children's Festival on The National Mall in Washington DC in June 2011 at www.icaf.org/whatwedo/wcf.html
You can help the children of Haiti and Chile cope with their earthquake traumas by supporting the Healing Arts Program at www.icaf.org/whatwedo/healingarts.html