



British-Arab Exchanges



latest news and events from **BAX**



**NEWS EXCHANGE**

**January 2013**

**2013: THE 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF BAX!**  
Read on to find out how to help celebrate!

## **AFTER THE UPRISINGS BAX'S MODEL OF "RELATIONSHIP POLITICS" PROVIDES A WAY FORWARD**

*By John Battle, British-Arab Exchanges Chairman*



In an age in which powers now quickly turn to air strikes and drones to address uprisings and conflict, never has there been a greater need for the politics of deep relationship building across the barricades. As we move further into the twenty-first century the international strategic analysts predict that the conflict focus will remain on the Arab world and its neighbours, from Iran and Iraq to Mali and the Maghreb.

The Arab Spring let the genie of democratic accountability out of the bottle in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain. The bloody struggle for the political soul of Syria tragically drags on. The Palestinian people remain under siege in a fight for space to survive with Israel and increasingly popular pressures for reforms lap up against the regimes of the Gulf States.

The historical track record of BAX and our recently strengthened voluntary organisation is well positioned to make a small but long lasting contribution of building new interpersonal relationships which not only establish new conduits of mutual understanding, but set up a practical template for conducting future relational building which could transform politics in a non violent way.

Patiently, quietly developing the contacts, arranging exchanges to really share each other's experiences, is the sustainable way forward in a world increasingly dissolving into violent reactions at the expense of generations of people throughout the Arab world. BAX must now consolidate and develop and extend its programmes as a much-needed model of practical action.



## FORUM IN EGYPT IN OCTOBER CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF BAX

BAX is holding a Forum in Egypt to celebrate 40 years of British-Arab Exchanges. The event, which is set to take place over three days from **Sunday 27 to Wednesday 30 October 2013 in Cairo**, is expected to bring together delegates from six Arab countries and Britain. All BAX alumni are invited to join us.

The gathering in Egypt will be setting a precedent by bringing together BAX alumni and supporters from across the Arab world and the UK. Together they will celebrate what we've learned from one another and our shared values. It will be the first time in BAX history that we will connect people across regions, religions and generations, to meet, share ideas, and draft a plan for the important role BAX can play in the future.

For forty years BAX has been organizing educational exchanges between people from the UK and the Arab world. More than forty exchanges have been made since our first visit to Egypt in 1973. Since then, we have organized exchanges with Jordan, Sudan, the Palestinian Territories (both West Bank and Gaza), Lebanon and Iraq. The work has built understanding across the divides.

Participants will be invited to cover their own travel costs, and contribute a modest daily rate for accommodation and meals. If you would like to sign up, help out or ask a question, please get in touch with us at: [info@bax.org.uk](mailto:info@bax.org.uk) and we will distribute more information to all alumni very soon.

A financial contribution to the gathering would also be very welcome, as there will be additional costs, and a hardship fund for those needing support with the expense of the trip. Please read the note from our treasurer later in this newsletter, to see how you can donate.

*Emily Harding*

## BRITISH ARABIAN NIGHTS CONCERT 13 FEBRUARY Celebration and Fundraiser

Our fortieth anniversary year will be a very special one for all of us at BAX, and we'd like to invite you to help us start it off in style by coming along to our first ever concert. The event, which takes place in London on **Wednesday February 13 at 7.30pm**, will be a unique evening celebrating some great musical talent from Britain and the Arab world.

We are delighted to announce that our headline act will be the international flautist Wissam Boustany. He'll be joined by some talented young Arab musicians, singer Merit Ariane Stephanos and pianist Riyad Nicholas. The programme will reflect a variety of musical styles, and celebrate human contact across cultures, and young people in music. We're very excited to be holding the concert in the beautiful venue of *St Michael's Church, Chester Square, Belgravia*, which is just a stone's throw from Victoria train station.

We want to bring together as many BAX supporters as we can, both old and new, and highlight some of the great, life-changing leadership programmes and cultural exchanges we run. We will also be raising crucial funds for our return visit of British delegates to Palestine in April. So please spread the word and buy your tickets now!

Our evening of celebration will feature some beautiful music by some top-class musicians. Wissam is originally from Lebanon, but has been based in the UK for many years. Through his long international career, Wissam has won critical acclaim for his performances and has used his music to support humanitarian efforts and promote peace around the world. Arabic singer and composer Merit Stephanos has Egyptian and German roots, and will treat us to her special blend of Arabic and Western classical contemporary music. Syrian pianist Riyad Nicolas is establishing himself as a rising star on the UK's classical music scene, and will play a mix of Western and Arabic music.

Ticket prices are £15 each (£10 students), with all profits going to support BAX's great work. Book tickets on <http://britisharabiannights.eventbrite.co.uk> or if you'd like to reserve seats or want more information, please get in touch with us at [events@bax.org.uk](mailto:events@bax.org.uk) or telephone 01865 511 800.



## **PARTNERSHIPS WITH PALESTINE CREATING DIALOGUE AND TRUST**

### **Building Bridges – return visit to Palestine April 2013**

In November 2011 we hosted a group of Palestinian emerging civil society leaders - young professionals identified by local NGOs as having leadership potential. They have now requested a return visit and a British group is planning to visit those in the West Bank in the second and third weeks of April. It is hoped that a visit to Gaza will be possible later in the year.

This visit will be the first that BAX has organised to Palestine. The programme will involve meetings with a wide variety of people in positions of responsibility in Palestinian society, and encounters with their contemporaries. There will also be visits to sites of historical and national importance. Nine young professionals from different parts of the UK and Ireland have been selected and they will be accompanied by an experienced mentor.



### **‘Step Forward 2’ training course for Palestinian youth trainers**

In addition to our exchange visits, BAX is also supporting those who are building up the fabric of civil society in Arab countries. We are continuing to seek ways of expanding the resources and capacity of those giving training to young people in Palestine. One such group is Sonaa Al-Hayat (Life-makers) in Gaza, young professionals who in their spare time deliver courses to people younger than themselves.

The main course subjects are ‘thinking skills’ (ie critical thinking), ‘finding a purpose in life’ and ‘the happiest home’ (family relationships). We tried unsuccessfully each summer in 2006, 2007 and 2008 to get some of them out of Gaza for a training programme, but each time they had to cancel at the last moment because of difficulties either of leaving the country or uncertainties about getting back in.

Last year we succeeded in delivering a training programme to some of the leaders of the group, supported by the British Council which offered its video-conferencing facilities to enable the link to be made with London. Now we are working on a plan to get youth trainers from both Gaza and the West Bank to Egypt where our trainers can work with them face-to-face.

*Peter Riddell, Secretary.*



## LEADING THROUGH CONFLICT

*By Maisam Y. Abumorr, Gaza  
Member of the BAX Palestinian visit  
to the UK, November 2011*

*(Seen in this photo addressing Ministers  
in Northern Ireland)*



People can go through a number of hardships throughout their lifetime. Some of these experiences would break us, or at least we think so, and some might make us stronger and more able to adjust to exceptional situations. But what if your whole life was exceptional? What if you had to rebuild yourself and your life to fit your surroundings? What if death was the only stable fact in your life? Living in Gaza, I have that life.

A year ago, I had the chance to travel for the first time in my life. I was one of nine Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza taking part in BAX's exchange programme for emerging leaders in London. I had the chance to meet new people, to breathe a new air, to have something other than death and war to tell my grandchildren about. I could be physically moved from this big prison where I've spent all my life to the ... WORLD.

### *Becoming a leader*

I went there with leadership potential, and returned with a mature vision and solid plans. I've learned that a great story can be composed in the faintest candlelight. I've learned that there is no external force that can determine who you are or what path you should take, because no matter how strong it might be, your personal power is much stronger. I've also learned that a trapped body does not mean a trapped soul and does not equal a confined mind. I finally learned to ignore the outer chaos to reach inner peace.

There is a huge difference between me a year ago and me now. My old self would say in a state of war: "I have much to say but I have no means to say it". My new self won't even have time to say anything because I prefer to start acting. BAX has taught me that a leader is self-reliant – creating opportunities rather than searching for them.

### *Connecting with the world*

Even without a high-definition camera or a well-functioning laptop, I can use my writing to communicate with the world and help it see the real image of life under occupation, of children killed in air raids and terrified mothers looking to rescue those that have survived. On the BAX exchange, I learned that very few resources are needed in order to open a large window into Gaza, to allow the world to see what is really happening on the ground.

Real leaders are the ones holding the lantern, which lights up the dark and long tunnel leading to freedom and justice. They might get burned sometimes, but that is a sacrifice worth making in exchange for the privilege of leadership.

One thing I know for sure; that is I wasn't only born to be a good wife and have children. This might be only a small part of a much larger scheme God designed for me. I was born to be a human, a good human who helps other good humans to make this earth a better place for humanity. A woman can be a leader. A woman can be a great leader.



## **AVENUES OF HOPE - memories of a BAX visit to Lebanon**

*Robert Stainer recalls his time on a BAX exchange to Lebanon in 1996.*

*Robert is currently between jobs as a youth worker for the Anglican church in Kennington, SE London, and a parish priest in Surbiton.*

It had its quirky moments too: one chilly evening up in the mountains near Bsharre, an eccentric priest attempting to lead us in a sing-a-long of Bob Dylan's "Times They are a Changin'" without his really knowing the tune; in the back of a car, my hair standing on end, as we hurtled through the streets, being driven around Beirut by a young Shiite intent on displaying his masculinity; in town after town, comically attempting to join in with the various local dances... I could go on.

Yet the trip I took with five others to Lebanon through British Arab Exchanges in 1996 was profoundly important for my world view today. It felt like Lebanon as a country had already travelled through many of the issues that affect the present world, only in a more personal and vivid way. While our views of Islamic militancy are still defined by the September 2001 attacks, there we met Christians and Muslims whose sons had been killed for their religion in the civil war of the 1970s and '80s, (and who had already, miraculously, learned to forgive). Whilst we see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a distant grumble in world affairs, there we met the Palestinians who had left their houses in 1948 to live in refugee camps outside Beirut, and we also met the Lebanese who struggled to see how and why they should accommodate them. Whilst we meet grief but rarely in the West, their 16 years of civil war had left barely a family without a scar of some kind.

It is perhaps obvious to recognise the difference between theoretical debates and human lives lived in the flesh, but what that trip did was parachute all of us deep into the reality of human existence at the sharp end of conflicts over religion, land and world view. Through the great hospitality shown to us, and the carefully-thought through programme, we were taken both into the tragedy of what had happened there and towards avenues of hope that cycles of violence might end.

Just last week, as a school chaplain, I taught a lesson about the Middle East to a group of thirteen year olds, in their "Religion in the News" module of Religious Studies. The nuances of debate came easily to me: I had seen something of it first hand: for them, and even for the teacher, it was a whole new world. One almost inevitably comes out of a BAX trip with a serious understanding of the Middle East and the Arab world: it just seeps into you. (And, of course, it can continue: I have had the privilege of hosting sessions with visiting groups from Iraq in the last few years, and have learnt a great deal on each occasion.)

It's not a 'cheap' way to do things, shuttling groups between the Middle East and Britain: and it requires significant organisation at either end. British-Arab Exchanges, though, has a well of four decades' experience so that the quality of visit is fantastically high. Every relationship is made to count; every community is given the chance to express itself; every view is heard and digested, and in that spirit ideas can be suggested without rancour or fear of giving offence.

For those of us who had the privilege to go on one of those trips, it is equally important that we make it count, that we continue to educate, and speak up for futures of hope not despair. Of course, the deeper one goes into the Middle East, the more complicated it becomes: on the macro level, it is hard to know how to act in a way that does not in some way discriminate against one or other group, nation or people. All of that makes me incline towards the value of the small scale efforts as represented by BAX: small in the number they directly involve, but hopefully much greater in terms of the ripples that come out from them, and one where I am certain that they stand for peace in a perilously fragile situation.



## CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF BRITISH-ARAB EXCHANGES

### 1973

*British university students entertained on the Nile by Egyptian students*



### 2011

*Emerging leaders from Palestine visiting London*





## **MONEY MATTERS**

### **An Appeal from the Treasurer**

Dear Friends of BAX

You will have read in previous pages some of our plans for the future.

We are a completely volunteer-run organisation, and we depend on people who want to build 'links of trust and friendship' with the Arab world.

We have greatly benefited from the energy and expertise of those who have helped host Arab delegations to the UK, and who are currently working to organise the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert, the return visit to Palestinians in the West Bank in April, the training programme for Palestinian youth trainers, and our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary forum in Cairo in October.

They are all members of our management team who also form small teams with responsibility for communications, administration, finance and fundraising. We would value others joining us to be a member of one of these teams. They give their time and in most cases cover their own expenses.

Another way you could help is with our fundraising activities. The total anticipated budget for our projects this year is around £42,000. Of course we hope our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert will raise some funds, and participants in some of the activities will make their own contributions, but there will be a considerable balance to raise by other means.

We fund our exchange visits by making an appeal to friends of BAX, Charitable Trusts, commercial organisations and institutions that share our concern for Arab-UK relationships. We are grateful to have received recently a grant for £500 for volunteer expenses from one of the City Livery Companies. We invite friends of BAX to help by spreading the word about BAX and by helping us identify potential donors or likely sources of financial support for our projects.

You might like to consider BAX in your charitable giving and make a regular donation by standing order - as has one of the contributors to this newsletter! In which case, please complete a Standing Order mandate ([click here](#)) and return it to me at the address below (not your bank).

Single donations are easily made online through TheBigGive ([click here](#)) or by cheque to British-Arab Exchanges and sent to the address below. (UK taxpayers are invited to complete a Gift Aid form which can be downloaded [click here](#)).

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [michael.maddox@bax.org.uk](mailto:michael.maddox@bax.org.uk) if you seek further information.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddox  
Hon Treasurer

**British-Arab Exchanges, 12a Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SF**