

AFOPA Media Release - Annual General Meeting – 21ST July 2010

The AFOPA Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 July at 6.30pm sharp at the Peregrine Corporation Head Office, 270 The Parade Kensington Park. Refreshments will be available. PLEASE RSVP to secretary@afopa.com.au (this will assist with catering).

The business part of the meeting will commence at exactly 6.30 for approximately an hour. This will feature the Chairperson's and Treasurer's reports and introduction of the new Executive Committee. This will be followed by a talk from our guest speaker, Constantine Dabbagh, who is a Palestinian Christian and the Executive Director of the Middle East Council of Churches (or MECC), Department of Service for Palestinian Refugees in the Gaza Strip.

Constantine, who is also known in Arabic as Abu Su'ad, is an outstanding leader within Gaza and within the Palestinian NGO community, through the provision of Christian funded and delivered health care, education and community services which care for the Muslim population of Gaza. In particular, the services focus on mothers and babies, vocational education and the provision of psychosocial health services to an increasingly traumatized population.

Constantine Dabbagh was born in Jerusalem in 1938 and in the midst of fierce fighting in 1947, fled as a refugee to Gaza. During his life and career he has worked for United Nations Emergency Force (Peace Keeping Force) in Gaza and United Nations in the Republic of Congo (now Zaire), consistently advocating non-violence amidst living conditions that are approaching a humanitarian crisis. His personal and professional dialogue of justice, peace, security, mutual understanding and reconciliation has seen him consulted during critical negotiations between political factions within Palestine and between Palestine and the international community.

As a mark of the importance of the work done by the MECC and Constantine Dabbagh's standing within the community, when fighting broke out between Fateh and Hamas forces in Gaza in 2007, Hamas ensured that the offices of the MECC were protected from damage and were able to continue their vital services within the community. Constantine is a person of peace, courage, integrity and faith. Despite holding a Greek passport which would enable him to migrate from Gaza and suffering from long-term health impairments, he chooses to remain with his people and serve their needs, showing that peaceful, committed and courageous reconciliation are possible.

Jeanie Lucas

For the Executive Committee of the
Australian Friends of Palestine Association

Why Palestine? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for
equality and human rights. Edward Said