

Political Activists from Palestine

Talking About the Holocaust

2013-2016

Understanding History Through Non-Formal Education

First Steps...

As part of a broader educational exchange program with Germany in May 2013, a group of young adults, activists from Independence Youth Union (IYU) from Palestine, spent one day in Erfurt and Weimar. Together with members of the German youth movement (SJD - Die Falken), they learned about the National Socialist regime, which ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. The general question that the group dealt with was 'how do we deal with this part of history in non-formal education today?'



Besides workshops on the topic, the group was shown two movies before visiting the memorial site of Buchenwald. During the Nazi era, this former concentration camp was one of the biggest of its kind in Germany. Thus, the visit gave a brief but intense impression of what happened during this period.





History, Remembrance and Solidarity...

...used to be the main themes of seminars with SJD – Die Falken from Germany and the Palestinian IYU. Between the 4th-12th of September 2015 young activists from both countries met for ten days in Berlin to share the intense experience of an international seminar: “What does it mean to you? Understanding the past, shaping the future“.



Talking with each other but not about each other was the purpose of the encounter. For young people from Germany and Palestine, talking about the Holocaust and the Nakba (the Palestinian ‘catastrophe’) is maybe one of the hardest thing to do. Against this background they struggled with the question of how history happens and how do we relate to it.



The discussions and workshops went on late into the night mostly revolving around the conditions and requirements necessary for building a common struggle for a better future. Emphasis was placed on the logic and ideology behind Nazism, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The program included visits to the memorial at ‘Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz’ as well as the former concentration camp ‘Sachsenhausen’.



Staring in to the Abyss, Believing in Better

In August 2016, some 20 Palestinian young activists from IYU took the initiative of organizing an excursion from an international youth camp in Bavaria to the nearby memorial center at the former concentration camp of Dachau.



After a thorough introduction to the site, two professional guides led a tour through the memorial. Simply put, there are not words to describe what was observed. Staring into the abyss of history is important for the simple fact that heinous acts such as those committed during the Holocaust were carried out by people, and therefore can be repeated.





An evaluation was followed by long talks on the bus back to the camp and throughout following days.

This part was perhaps the hardest of all, until now. One thing is certain; this trip will not be the last. Getting in touch with the traumatic history of the other helps to understand their needs and behavior. More seminars are currently in the planning stage. A group of young German activists will visit Palestine, getting to know the history of the Nakba alongside workshops on the topic of the Holocaust.



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**If we could understand the reasons
for the behavior of others,
suddenly everything would make sense.**

[Sigmund Freud]