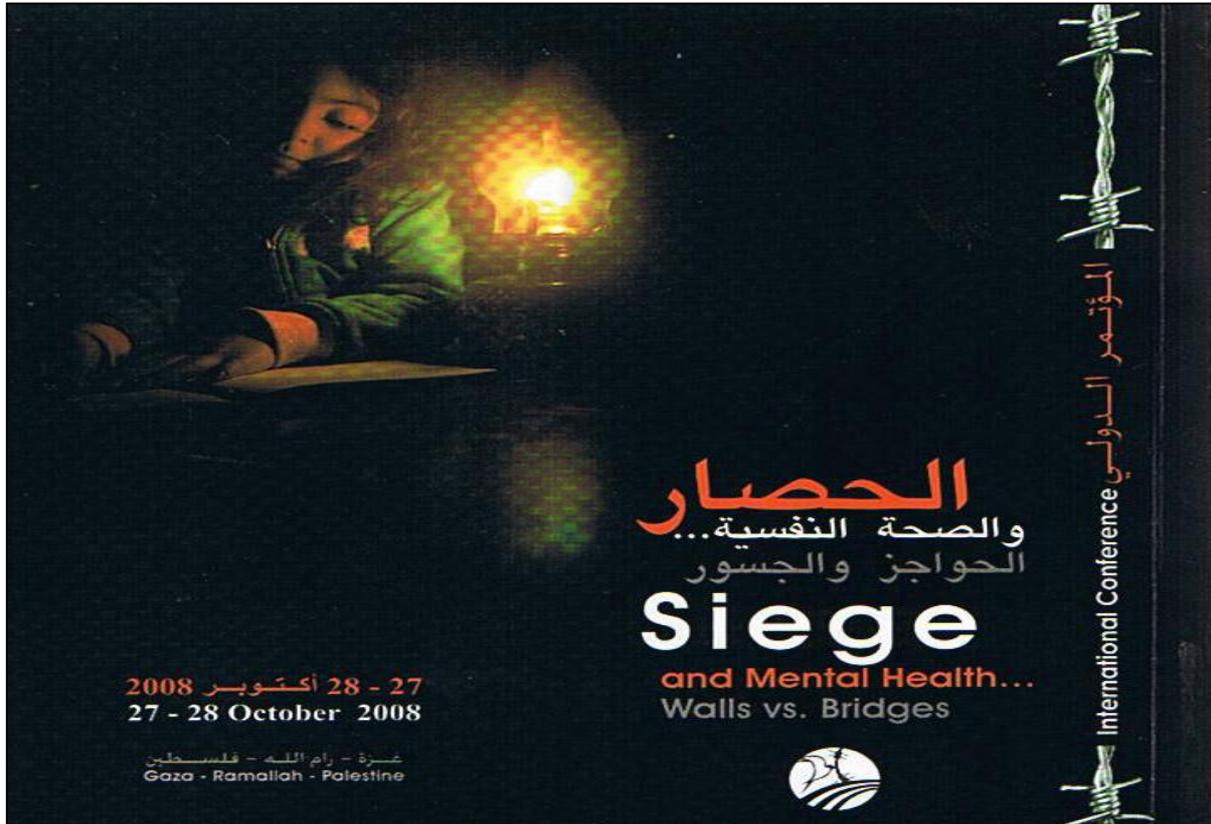




**"DESPITE BEING A VICTIM OF SIEGE"**

**The conference on siege and mental health convened**

**GCMHP and WHO organize the International Conference "Siege and Mental Health... Walls vs. Bridges" on 27-28 October**





Despite the siege imposed on Gaza Strip, Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) Organization (WHO) international conference Mental Health... Walls conference was held in 120 internationals and human rights activists, professionals as well as individuals. The



held in both Gaza (Rashad El Shawa Center and through Video link with Ramallah, Cultural Palace on 27 and 28 October 2008. The the presence of local academics, mental health interested conference was

held in both Gaza (Rashad El Shawa Center and through Video link with Ramallah, Cultural Palace on 27 and 28 October 2008.

The major goal of the conference was to discuss the consequences of siege on the mental health and human rights situation under the siege imposed on Gaza since

more than 17 months. The conference included 45 papers, 22 of them were internationals.

Dr. Eyad El Sarraj, President of Gaza Community Mental Health Programme commenced the conference addressing the attendance and emphasizing the hardships of convening the conference under siege despite the obstacles imposed. Dr. Sarraj emphasized the conference message of peace and love for all who what peace because the Palestinians love peace, freedom and independence.

A speech was delivered on behalf of Prince of Jordan, HRH Hassan Ben Talal expressing the Arab solidarity with Palestinians under siege and the importance of ending the siege and the state of the division in the Palestinian society.

Mr. Tony Lurance, Head of WHO in Gaza and West Bank, highlighted the deterioration of health services due to siege. On behalf of the Donor Consortium, Mr. Mario Carera stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to develop the Palestinian community in the fields of development, health care and education. Mr. Carera considered this siege as a sort of collective punishment that shall be terminated immediately.

A support letter, then was delivered by Ms. Luisa Morgantini, Deputy of EU Parliament , in which she talked about the difficult conditions that people in Gaza go through, where they are deprived from their basic rights of living and freedom. She also stressed the importance of solidifying the international efforts to end the siege and achieve justice to the Palestinians.

Mr. Henry Sigman, Head of the Middle East Project/USA said that there is a need to work with political and moral prospects to end the tragedy of future generations. Dr. Mark Van Ommeren from WHO – Geneva, presented a speech entitled “mental health and psychosocial support during and after acute emergencies”, stressing the importance of psychosocial support programs in times of wars and crises.

In another expression of solidarity, Ms. Rosalynn Carter, former US first Lady, and creator of Mental Health Unit in Carter Center for Peace, pointed out that there are increasing mental health problems including trauma, depression and anxiety resulting from the siege. She added that there is a need to treat the impact of siege in order to ensure that Palestinian are living a dignified life with their rights respects.

At the end to the first panel, Professor Federico Allodi, from Near East Cultural Foundation in Canada, pointed to the widespread reactions and behavioral reactions and responses of adolescences and children as well as division within the family and the community resulting from the siege in Gaza.

In the second panel , a number of prominent international figures and academics delivered keynote speeches. Professor Wim Wolters, from University of Utrecht in Netherlands, emphasized the importance of debriefing for mental health professional who work with traumatized individuals. Then, Dr. Judith Duetch from Institute of Psychoanalysis in Canada, presented a psychoanalytical vision regarding the siege of Israel to Gaza, emphasizing that Israel distorting the facts and justifying the siege of Gaza. Professor Uri Hadar from University of Tel Aviv talked about the Israeli vision regarding the siege of Gaza, indicating that the majority of Israelis believe that Gaza is Hamas and therefore they support all what the army is doing in Gaza. Dr. Ghada Karmi from University of Exeter – UK, talked about the siege impacts on the Palestinian Issue from the international perspective, indicating that the internationals silence led to impunity and unaccountability of Israel.

In order to have the utmost benefits for the participants, the conference then was divided into various workshops. The main themes addressed in the conference were: international experiences of siege; siege and mental health; siege and public

health; women, children and family under siege; siege, culture democracy and civil society, siege in international law and human rights; and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

During the conference various discussions and exchanging of views and experiences took place both in Gaza and Ramallah.

