



# Dundee–Nablus Twinning Association

رابطة توأمة دندي نابلس



## Convener's report 2017

It is usual to start with a positive report but, for DNTA, 2016-17 was overshadowed by a major disappointment with serious concerns for the future. This was the collapse of a cultural visit by teenagers from Nablus because their British visas were refused.

Last year, we responded positively to a request from the Nablus Municipality to host young people in Dundee for a cultural visit. By mutual effort we created and funded a programme for four teenagers to visit Dundee this summer. Sadly, the whole enterprise collapsed when the British government refused visas for all participants. From what I have seen, the refusals were based on minor technicalities in the visa applications; the visa officers thereby claimed the applicants might not return home after their visit here.

This was all despite a very positive invitation from the Lord Provost of Dundee and a carefully prepared programme for the visitors. Refusing visas on minor issues will make twinning visits impossible. It was unfortunate that the General Election of 2017 meant that no MPs could question these refusals. We must ask our newly-elected MPs what can be done to avoid such issues in future.

What a waste; Nablus spent a lot of money on plane tickets and applications; we spent time and energy in planning and organising the visit. With such a high risk of British visas being refused it is hard to see Nablus Municipality participating in any further visits. This is a disaster.

## Highlights

Looking back on more positive events of last year, we started with Mary McGregor and Nick Steff describing at our AGM their experiences of Nablus on a DNTA visit in 2015. Mohamad Issa movingly spoke at Madigan's about Being Palestinian.

At the Dundee Food & Flower Festival we had a popular stall offering information about Nablus, encouraging membership and serving mint tea. It was particularly good to welcome the visitors from Nablus who were attending the Lord Provost's twinning weekend.

For our Anniversary lecture in November we welcomed Sir Vincent Fean, former Consul General in Jerusalem responsible for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including Nablus. He wants the UK to recognise the state of Palestine. Wendy Alexander – Vice Principal (International), University of Dundee – explained how she was working with Sir Vincent to participate in the HESPAL scheme whereby staff at Palestinian universities would be funded to come to Dundee for post-graduate training.

At our Lunch for Nablus we raised funds for our trauma project. This helps school children in Nablus to cope with the many traumas resulting from occupation.

Stones played a prominent part in an insightful talk by Alex Holmes. He is a stonemason from Angus who spent three months in Yanoun – a small village near to Nablus. His interesting talk explained many links between quarries, stones, stone-carving and the occupation.

DNTA has supported volunteers to Project Hope – the biggest volunteering project in Nablus. We have also been welcomed in Nablus with hospitality from Project Hope. So we were pleased to welcome Hakim Sabbah – its Director – to talk to us in May.

### **Six Days – Fifty Years**

Looking backwards to help us to look forwards was one motivation for asking six people in Nablus to recall their memories of the Six Day War in 1967. 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of this war and 50 years of the occupation of Nablus (and Palestine) which continues to this day. It is hard to contemplate living for 50 years under occupation. It has a profound effect on the people of Nablus, not least by the settlements which surround it. Our role is non-political so we do not prescribe a solution but we can draw attention to the rights of the people of Nablus to live in freedom and peace. We can also listen to them and pass on their views and experiences to our members, the people of Dundee and beyond.

### **Committee and supporters**

Thanks to all the committee for their input, support and efforts. We will miss those who are retiring and thank them for their work over the years, especially our Membership Secretary Catherine Rice. We hope new volunteers will bring their enthusiasm to develop and strengthen the important and significant twinning between the two cities of which we are so proud.

### **Futures**

I still look forward to a positive future. The HESPAL initiative should bring visitors from Nablus to undertake higher education training here. Such exchange of people between the two cities bring a human focus on the essential elements of twinning – friendship and understanding.

We welcome the appointment of Ian Borthwick as the new Lord Provost of Dundee and will work with him to strengthen the twinning between the people of Nablus and Dundee. Please do what you can to help. We need to grow in membership and involvement so renew your membership, encourage others to join and come along to our meetings.

Mike Whitehead

June 2017

### **Committee Members 2016-2017**

Mike Whitehead	Convener
Alister Rutherford	Vice-convener and Newsletter Editor
Mohamad Issa	Vice-convener and Treasurer
Bob Duncan	<i>Lord Provost (ex officio)</i>
Jane Barron	<i>Secretary (resigned during the year)</i>
Ian Barron	Nablus Liaison
Katherine Gray	Event Organiser
Christine Issa	Minute Secretary
Catherine Rice	Membership Secretary
Vanessa Stark	Event Organiser