



The Galilee Society Newsletter

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EJC Launches Major Campaign in Majd El Kroum Arab Town in the Galilee

The inhabitants of Majd El Kroum Arab town in northern Israel, together with the Galilee Society Environmental Justice Center (EJC), are rising up in protest against the serious health and environmental hazards caused by the inadequate sewage system and illegal waste sites in place in the town.



The Galilee Society EJC was recently approached by members of the Majd El Kroum community, expressing concerns about the long-running sewage and waste disposal problem in their town. Together with the Galilee Society Health Rights Center, the EJC staff swiftly arranged to go on a tour around the town to evaluate the situation for themselves.

“The situation was bad”, Mr. Azzam, the Galilee Society’s Environmental Lawyer, says. “The sewage system of the town was blocked, due to its capacity being utterly inadequate, and the town was flooded with sewage.” Not only this, the general waste disposal situation in Majd El Kroum is being grossly neglected by the Local Authorities and the regional

and national powers overseeing them, with illegal waste sites to be found arbitrarily throughout the town. The situation has by now become intolerable for the local population as the health hazards and environmental degradation continue to increase. The authorities however, fail to act. This is why the inhabitants of Majd El Kroum, together with the Galilee Society, are initiating an extensive Environmental Justice Campaign.

As a first step, Mr. Azzam has sent a letter to the Ministries of Health and Environment, as well as to the Local Authorities in Majd El Kroum, demanding they take measures to deal with the situation. Furthermore, the EJC is preparing a special report on the situation in the town, to be distributed at an upcoming meeting with the local population in the town. The next step in the campaign will consist of a demonstration held in Majd El Kroum, pressing for just environmental conditions in Arab locations in Israel, after which a general strike will be called in the town. If no action is taken in response to these letters and demonstrations, the Galilee Society will send a pre-petition to the High Court of Justice.

A crucial fact pointed out by Mr. Azzam, is that this situation is by no means unique to Majd El Kroum, but it epitomizes a problem that has existed in many Arab locations in Israel for several years. The local authorities in these communities are essentially those responsible for guaranteeing proper sewage and waste disposal, in order to protect the health and environment of their inhabitants. However, the funds allocated to Arab localities are disproportionately low and the implementation of proper sanitation is not being carefully managed from above. Mr. Azzam therefore stresses that “this campaign will start in Majd El Kroum, but we are hoping other Arab villages will join in and we can make a real impact to improve this situation for all Arab localities.”

* Picture shows open sewage in the Arab town of

Majd El Kroum in northern Israel.

[Click here to see recent video footage from Majd El Kroum!](#)

Six-Year Wastewater Treatment Project Concluded at R&D Center

The Galilee Society Regional Research & Development (R&D) Center has recently completed a six-year project, funded by the USAID MERC (Middle East Regional Cooperation) program, concerning wastewater treatment and reuse research. The project was carried out as a cooperative effort by the Appropriate Technology Consortium (ATC). This group was set up in 1997 and includes the Galilee Society, the Palestinian Hydrology Group in the West Bank (1), the Egyptian Center of Organic Agriculture (2), and the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa (3).



Water scarcity and the contamination of surface and groundwater are problems that affect people on a local, national, as well as regional level in the Middle East. On the one hand, current water resources are insufficient to meet the demands of growing populations and ever increasing water consumption. Water scarcity is in fact one of the major sources of political conflict between the countries of the region.

On the other hand, current wastewater treatment technologies in the region are often inadequate or lacking altogether. As the Scientific Director of the Galilee Society R&D Center, Dr. Isam Sabbah, says, “there exists a problem in Arab villages in Israel, of untreated wastewater being disposed of and flowing freely in the streets and in agricultural fields due to a lack of adequate sanitary infrastructure” (For more on this, see article above). As a consequence, freshwater sources and the soil are polluted, creating serious health and environmental threats.

However, setting up efficient wastewater treatment systems in the rural areas of the Middle East is problematic, since most of the existing technologies are highly energy intensive. This means they are costly and they require complex mechanical equipment and highly skilled personnel operating them. Arab villages on the other hand often lack the means, infrastructure and expertise needed to run such systems. Typically, the wastewater generated in Arab villages also contains high levels of organic matter, due to relatively low water usage, which makes it particularly difficult to treat in intensive systems.

In an attempt to improve the situation for the disadvantaged rural population in Arab villages in Israel and in the Middle East more widely, the Galilee Society, together with its partners, initiated a project to find a wastewater treatment technology appropriate for their specific conditions. This meant developing an extensive, as opposed to intensive, wastewater treatment system, depending primarily on natural processes, allowing low maintenance and being simple to operate, with minimal energy requirements. Such technologies do exist in many places in the world, but the aim of the ATC has been to modify and improve existing technologies to develop a system that fits the specific conditions of rural areas in the Middle East.

As part of the research work for this project, a pilot wastewater treatment plant was set up in 1999 in the northern Israeli town of Sakhnin, which is the only Arab community in the country to have a conventional basic extensive sewage treatment system. The research process consisted of installing several treatment units, including Vertical Aerobic Beds, an Up-flow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket (UASB) Reactor, a Horizontal Subsurface Flow Constructed Wetland, an Intermittent Sand Filter, and a Wastewater Reservoir, and evaluating their performance under specific conditions, on a small scale. After initial research, an Irrigation System Pilot was set up in Sadat City in Egypt, where the

treated wastewater was tested on different crops, and a full-scale Treatment and Reuse System is yet to be completed in Beny Zaid, in the Ramallah District of the West Bank.

It is hoped the technologies developed as a result of the ATC research will shortly be available for use more widely in the rural areas of the Middle East. Intensive trainings and workshops have already been conducted for farmers, technicians, health care professionals, and students, and the three pilot sites all function as important resource centers. Farmers in particular can expect many advantages from technologies such as these. In Sakhnin for example, the currently available system allows the use of about 250,000m³ of treated water with a quality that is far from satisfactory. However, if the ATC model was implemented on a large scale, there could, in two years' time, be up to 1 million m³ of high quality treated wastewater available for irrigation each year.

The farmers of Sakhnin are aware of the potential benefits of upgrading their system and they have set up an organization to further their case for improved wastewater treatment in the community. As Dr. Sabbah says, "the people of Sakhnin have been given a new vision and they are pressuring the Municipality to upgrade the existing wastewater treatment system, based on the ATC study". If such a plan is carried out, it will allow these farmers to greatly increase the number of crops grown and their livelihood will improve considerably.

* Picture shows the Irrigation System Pilot site set up by the ATC in Sadat City in Egypt.

- (1) <http://www.phg.org/>
- (2) <http://www.ecoa.com.eg/>
- (3) <http://www.technion.ac.il/>

EJC Victory in Campaign against Plans to Build Incinerator

After a two-year long campaign, the Galilee Society Environmental Justice Center (EJC) has welcomed a decision by the Regional Committee for Planning and Building to accept the center's objections against plans to build a waste incinerator in the Arab town of Shefa-'Amr in northern Israel. The decision of the Committee, taken in February 2006, was based on the negative professional opinion concerning the plan, issued by the Ministry of Environment.



The campaign against the plans to build the incinerator in the industrial area east of Shefa-Amr began in 2003. At the time, the Galilee Society convened a meeting in the town to inform the inhabitants of the proposed plans as well as the health, environmental and economic hazards such a waste incinerator would create. As a result of this meeting, a Public Committee was set up under the leadership of Mr. Mohammad Abu Raed, a Chemical Engineer and resident of Shefa-Amr.

"The environment is very important for me", Mr. Abu Raed says, "and it was therefore very important for me to resist this plan". As head of the Public Committee he worked in close relation with the EJC as well as the local population of Shefa-Amr and surrounding villages, spreading information about the issue and gathering support for the campaign. This involved raising awareness in the local schools and among the population generally, lobbying Arab Members of Knesset, as well as drawing up a petition, signed by up to 5,000 residents of Shefa-Amr, and sending it to the Ministry of the Environment.

In the meantime the Galilee Society EJC was also preparing for legal action and a public campaign against the incinerator plan. A letter sent to the

Ministries of Environment and Interior in September 2005, demanding they put a halt to the plans to build the incinerator, resulted in the Ministry of Environment issuing a negative professional opinion of the plan, thereby accepting the Galilee Society's objections. As mentioned above, this led to the Regional Committee for Planning and Building rejecting the plans to build a waste incinerator in Shefa-Amr.

This is a major achievement for the people of Shefa-Amr and for the Galilee Society's Environmental Justice Center. It has been an important campaign and the sudden rejection of the plans was a somewhat unexpected decision. According to Mr. Abu Raed, he was "very surprised by the decision, but it is a great outcome and the people of Shefa-Amr are grateful for the work the Galilee Society has done on this issue."

* Picture shows the Galilee Society's Environmental Lawyer, Mr. Shadi Azzam (left), and Environmental Planner, Mr. Naim Daoud, who organized the campaign against the incinerator in Shefa-Amr.

Naqab: 500 Bedouin Children Participate in Galilee Society Health Day in Arara

On 14 March 2006, the Galilee Society Naqab Department organized a Community Health Day in a school in Arara, one of the Government recognized townships in the Naqab that also provides education for the children of a number of surrounding unrecognized villages. The event was attended by around 500 Bedouin children, 50 of their parents and 22 teachers.



Through this health day, the Galilee Society aimed to raise awareness among the Bedouin population on various health issues affecting them in their

everyday life. Levels of health awareness are relatively low among the Bedouins of the Naqab and combined with the low level of services available to them, they find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. The topics dealt with therefore included information about household accidents, good and balanced nutrition, as well as the physiology of the human body.

Some of the activities of this awareness raising event were organized by the group of high school students who recently completed the Galilee Society Naqab Department's Youth-to-Youth project. This project is based on the peer education model, which means the students initially received training on issues relating to health and environment and subsequently implemented their own activities among fellow students.

In addition to the various awareness raising activities organized during the health day, an information pack was also put together, containing a number of different health awareness leaflets, for all the participants of the health day as well as their families.

* Picture shows the Youth-to-Youth group in Arara. They took part in organizing a health day in one of the town's elementary schools.

Friends of the Galilee Society Active in the United States

The Friends of the Galilee Society in the United States was established in 2005 in order to support the Galilee Society and other Palestinian civil society organizations working to promote the legal, social and economic rights of the Palestinian minority in Israel. Legally registered in accordance with United States laws, the Friends of the Galilee Society has also obtained 501(c)3 status under the Internal Revenue Service, allowing it to receive tax-exempt donations in the United States. (See "Other News in

Brief and How to Donate" below for more information on how to support the Galilee Society.)

Recently, the coordinator of the Friends of the Galilee Society in the United States, Ms. Riham Barghouti, took part in the Arab American Friends of Nazareth Reunion held on 17-19 February 2006 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The event was attended by over 400 Palestinians, mostly from Nazareth and living in the United States and Canada. During the welcoming ceremony, Ms. Barghouti gave a short speech in which she provided information about the work of the Galilee Society to the attendees.

The Friends of Nazareth was established in 1998 and focuses on carrying out social and humanitarian work to support the Palestinian people. Towards this end they support, among other organizations, the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund, an NGO that aims to locate free medical care in the U.S. for children who cannot be adequately treated in the Middle East.

Possibilities for future cooperation were explored during a meeting with members of the Board of the Friends of Nazareth. Among other issues discussed was the possibility of developing a campaign to assist the Friends of Nazareth in one of their current activities to find a bone marrow donor for a young girl of Palestinian descent in the United States.

The Friends of the Galilee Society hopes to continue developing and promoting productive and beneficial relationships between the Palestinian communities living in the United States and in Israel in the near future. It aims to establish valuable relationships with individuals and organizations in the United States in order to gather support for the work of the Galilee Society.

Other News in Brief and How to Donate

R&D CENTER ACTIVITIES:

- Visit by Representatives of UK Trade & Investment:

A meeting was held at the Galilee Society R&D Center on 8 March 2006, with two representatives of UK Trade & Investment (1). This is the Government organization that supports British companies doing business internationally as well as overseas enterprises seeking to locate in the UK. The two representatives visiting the R&D Center on this occasion were Mr. Carl Bruce, the Head of the Israel & Levant Team at UK Trade &

Investment in London, and Mr. Yigal Levine, Senior Trade and Investment Advisor at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Their visit was motivated by an interest in the Galilee Society's research activities and the startup companies that have been set up as a consequence. Opportunities were therefore explored concerning possible partnerships between British companies and some of the Galilee Society startup companies, which include Zeitouna, Synthatex (2), Attarex and Enzymotec (3). As the UK Trade and Investment is currently increasing its focus on the Arab sector within Israel they are therefore looking into the possibility of developing commercial relationships with these companies.

Following this meeting, UK Trade & Investment has also invited a representative of the Galilee Society to take part in a Life Science Mission in the UK, organized by the Centre of Excellence in Life Sciences" (CELS). The objective of this mission is to promote collaborations, partnerships and commercial ventures between Israeli and UK life science and the program will include a series of one-to-one meetings and visits to relevant companies/centers of excellence in the area.

(1) <https://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/ukti/appmanager/ukti/splash>

(2) <http://www.synthatex.com/>

(3) <http://www.enzymotec.com/Page.asp?cc=01020405>

- Lecture on a Balanced Approach to Research on Genetically-Modified Crops:

On 13 February 2006, Professor K.G. Raghothama, specializing in plant physiology at the Center for Plant Stress Environmental Physiology at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana (USA), delivered a lecture entitled, "Agricultural Biotechnology: Opportunities and Challenges" at the Galilee Society R&D Center. Prof. Raghothama was visiting Israel to discuss collaborative research efforts between Israel, the US, Jordan and Palestine via the MARD fund (Multinational Agricultural Research and Development).

Prof. Raghothama began by discussing the current state of research on genetically-modified (GM) crops and went on to talk about the developing country experience with GM crops. He related the discussion back to the Middle East and identified the lack of GM crop research in this region. Iran is the only country in the Middle East currently exploring GM technology (Bt rice) but the professor suggested that Egypt, as one of the largest cotton exporters, could be a good candidate for Bt cotton.

Prof. Raghothama was also cognizant of public concern surrounding GM technology and Prof. Raghothama was clear to mention that only those GM crops that have been thoroughly researched in the lab and field for their environmental and health impacts could benefit parts of the developing world. He identified several legal challenges to introducing these crops, including restrictions on GM crops by the European Union, inadequate international and national regulatory systems, and intellectual property challenges with GM research. He also identified other challenges including consumer hesitation, the high cost of GM research, and the fact that GM research is still relatively new and needs time before success stories develop.

R&D Center scientists are currently researching bacterial, rather than plant, genetic modification for the biological control of pests.

- Other Visits:

On 6 February 2006 engineers from the Center of Environmental Diplomacy in Bethlehem and colleagues from the Union of Town Association for Environmental Equality in Sakhnin also visited the R&D Center. Isam Sabbah, Hassan Azaizeh, and Naim Daoud delivered presentations on various Galilee Society activities.

In addition to this, a group of R&D Center senior researchers (Hassan Azaizeh, Isam Sabbah, and Omar Said) visited the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature in Amman, Jordan in mid-February. The researchers met to discuss different collaborative environmental activities, including initiatives focusing on traditional medicinal plants in the Arabian region. Al Ahali, a community-based farmer group, also attended the meeting.

On 23 March 2006 Dr. Giora Rytwo, Head of the Environmental Division at Tel-Hai College, Kiryat Shmona, delivered a lecture entitled, "Engineered Organo-Clay Nanoparticles for Environmental Applications," at the GS R&D Center. He discussed the potential of clay mineral particles to absorb environmental pollutants.

THE EJC CONTINUES TO RAISE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE ARAB COMMUNITY

The Galilee Society's Environmental Planner, Mr. Naim Daoud, has conducted a number of lectures aimed at raising awareness on environmental issues among young Arab students as well as women. The lectures have been focusing on elementary and high schools, in places

such as Lod & Ramle in the Center, as well as Nazareth and Nahef village in the Galilee. In addition some lectures have been held for women's groups in Nazareth and in Abu Sinan village in the Galilee Region.

These lectures have dealt with a number of general environmental issues affecting the Arab population in Israel and Mr. Daoud has attempted to raise awareness on how we can all contribute to protecting the environment. Special emphasis has also been put on the issue of cellular antennas and the possible health and environmental consequences of radio-magnetic radiation.

Mr. Daoud also recently published an article on the issue of radio-magnetic radiation in Al Muzara journal.

NEW MEMBER OF STAFF JOINS AL-MAISSAM

Al-Maissam Medicinal Plants Center has recruited a new Educational Manager, Dr. Midhat Othman, to work on its various educational projects. Dr. Othman has a PhD in Microbiology and vast experience in the field of education. For example, he has previously worked at the Wastewater Treatment site in Sakhnin, set up by the R&D Center for its ATC project (see "Six-Year Wastewater Treatment Project Concluded at R&D Center" above).

DONATE

Help achieve equitable health, environmental, and socio-economic conditions and development opportunities for Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel by supporting the Galilee Society's work.

How To Donate to the Galilee Society

TAX-EXEMPT DONATIONS

In order to facilitate giving, the Galilee Society has recently gained tax-exempt status in the United States, via the Friends of the Galilee Society. For the time being however, tax-exempt donations are still made through Healing Across the Divides. To donate via Healing Across the Divides, please mark contributions as donor-advised to the Galilee Society and send to:

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DIRECT DONATIONS

To donate to the Galilee Society directly, please send checks (in any currency) payable to the Galilee Society at:
PO Box 330
Shefa-Amr, 20200
Israel

Alternatively, bank transfers (in any currency) can be made directly to the Galilee Society's bank account. Account Name: The Galilee Society: The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services; Account no. 9800; Bank name and address: Bank Hapoalim, Branch no. 731, Jabour Street, Shefa-Amr 20200, Israel; SWIFT code: POALILIT.

Please inform us of your donation at fnassar@gal-soc.org

The Galilee Society - The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services is a leading community-based Arab NGO. The overriding goal of the Galilee Society is the achievement of equitable health and socio-economic conditions for the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

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