

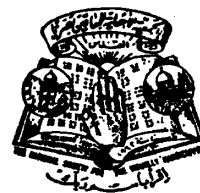
Some of you are anxiously waiting to know of a set date for the inauguration of the school building, as some are considering coming for the occasion. We would love to have as many friends as possible share this special moment with us. After all it is your hard efforts, great support, continued prayers and unconditional love that have seen us through.

After very extensive deliberations, we decided to put forward the date of the inauguration of the new purpose built Al-Shurooq School for Blind Children's building towards the last week of November.



One of the corridors on the second floor leading to classrooms

Note: If you have an e-mail address and you receive our newsletter via air mail, please contact us and we will e-mail you the newsletter. Saves us a lot on postage.



## THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

**The National Library For The Blind**

**AL-SHURROOQ SCHOOL FOR BLIND CHILDREN**

P.O. Box 19924, Jerusalem 91198

Tel (Library): +972-2-5814907

Tel/Fax (School): +972-2-2766151

Email: [info@nsfvh.org](mailto:info@nsfvh.org)

Website: [www.nsfvh.org](http://www.nsfvh.org)

### Quarterly Newsletter - Summer 2008

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Dear Friends,

*Just like anywhere else in the world, the weather here in Bethlehem, Palestine, has become most unpredictable. In the mornings, it is usually quite hot with temperatures soaring up to 35°C, while in the evenings, it could drop down to 14°C. Such is our political situation. One day we hear about an Israeli air raid killing six Palestinians in Gaza, and the day after we learn of a probable six-month truce between Israel and Hamas. The people in Gaza are hopeful that the siege could be lifted gradually, and that ultimately they will be able to lead an acceptable life. There is a great deal of talk about peace and a peaceful solution; but in reality, there is nothing happening on the ground. The same checkpoints and the same hardships still exist.*

*Helena Shehadeh*

## *Al-Shurooq School*

The children have had quite a busy term working as hard as they could particularly the last two weeks, studying for their end of year exams. It is all behind us now, and some have already gone home for their summer holidays. The seventeen remaining boys and girls are getting ready to go to summer camp to Tabgha near Tiberias, where they usually have a wonderful time. We will spend a whole week living in tents; leaving on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and returning on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June.

## *The School's Annual Excursion*

For the children's annual excursion, we decided to take them to Jericho on April the 16<sup>th</sup>. We had high hopes of the children being able to visit the Dead Sea and experience floating on its waters. But this was not to be. We were shocked and disappointed to know that all Palestinians are recently banned from reaching the shores of the Dead Sea. Again, this emphasizes our feelings of despair and anger. Nevertheless, we spent most part of the day in a new park called "Banana Land" that had two large swimming pools, an artificial river with boats to hire, a vast area for bike rides, an area for horse back riding, a children's play area with swings, slides and seesaws, and a few large non-poisonous snakes to hold and pause for a souvenir picture.

Our children were unable to get in the swimming pools as there were hundreds of other school children, much older than ours, wanting to swim at the same time. We tried to compensate their enjoying the water by a horse back ride and a nice long ride down the river, some were lucky enough to steer the boat and some dared to hold the snakes round their necks and pause!

After lunch, we paid a visit to "Hisham's Palace", an historic palace located 3 km north of Jericho, built by the Umayyad Caliph Hisham bin AbdulMalek (724-743 AD), who ruled the empire stretching from India to the Pyrenees.

We are extremely grateful to St. Andrew's Church Jerusalem and the Royal Danish Representative Office in Ramallah and Maersk Line for kindly covering the cost of the trip.



George Thalgei in the Banana Land

## *The Jerusalem Lending Library for the Blind*

The recently employed Ms Naimeh Abu-Ta'a is still reorganizing the library and making new arrangements. She is trying to secure funding for its maintenance. The aim is to encourage readers to come and use it. She currently has an assistant who is helping her revise all the books available in foreign languages and computerize them, so that an accurate catalogue is issued. Some of the books need to be destroyed and the book shelves renewed. Ever since Israel prevented Palestinians from entering East Jerusalem, our clients to the library have diminished considerably. We need to revive the work there by finding ways and means to encourage blind and visually impaired individuals to use it.

## *The Expected Move*

Construction on the site is going quite smoothly now, after a short period of uncertainty. That came about when the contractor informed us that it would be very difficult to continue with the building as he was losing a considerable amount of money with each payment, due to the significant drop in the rates of exchange from euros to shekels. At the time of signing the contract, the rate of exchange was 5.70 shekels to the euro and it had gone down to 4.90 shekels two weeks ago.

We approached the UNDP for possible compensation as they are supporting the construction, but regrettably compensation is against their policy.

The problem for the contractor is three fold:

1. The significant drop in the rates of exchange
2. The fabulous rise in the cost of building materials and,
3. The extra quantities of building materials required due to initial miscalculations in the bill of quantities

The contractor is now having to endure the rise in the cost of building materials and the cost of the unaccounted for quantities but it would be unfair to expect him also to put up with the drop in the rate of exchange.

Eventually, after very lengthy negotiations, we signed an agreement with the contractor stating that starting June 1<sup>st</sup>, we would partly compensate the drop in the rate of exchange to 5.40 shekels to the euro.

Unfortunately and as a result, the donations that you, friends and supporters, are sending are inevitably being used for that purpose, if not otherwise specified.