

For a Fair Exchange with Palestine – also in Tourism!

(Bonn, 09/03/2009) Until Christmas 2008, tourism to the Holy Land experienced an almost unprecedented boom. Living isolated behind walls and checkpoints, many people in Palestine saw this as an opportunity for more contacts with the world outside, for earning an income and for encounters with international guests. With the war in Gaza that killed 1,300 people earlier this year, all hopes have been squashed.

Palestinian tour operators have reported cancellations from tourist groups who cancel their trips in view of the global media coverage, because they are afraid to visit a war zone. The West Bank, however, was not affected. In this region, tourists can travel safely.

Rami Kassis and Michael Awad, "Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism" (PIRT), emphasize: "We invite people to come here and see for themselves what the situation is like, so that they get to know Palestine and the Palestinians and appreciate their culture. This is very important, especially under the present circumstances."

Expectations continue to be high: Palestine should get more out of tourism than just the exhaust fumes left behind by Israeli tourist busses on their flying visits to the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. As Rami Kassis and Michael Awad both explain, only five percent of tourist expenditure in the Holy Land actually benefit Palestine; 95 percent are spent in Israel which controls access to Palestinian territory and where the decisions on travel itineraries are made.

Despite the difficult conditions, civil society organisations in Palestine have joined hands with authorities, educational institutions, tourism enterprises and associations and have established a unique network: the "Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism". The initiative has developed a code of conduct (which is also available in German at EED) for just and responsible forms of tourism in the Holy Land. On the one hand, tourists are invited to visit Palestine and to take time for encounters with the Palestinian population in order to be able to gain new insights and a better understanding for their situation. On the other hand, the PIRT code calls upon the local tourism industry to meet tourists with respect, to acquaint them with the multifaceted culture of Palestine and to take responsibility for local communities and the environment.

Tourism is to be used as an opportunity for a fair exchange that benefits everybody involved by contributing to mutual understanding and a spirit of partnership.

Michael Awad (PIRT), director of Siraj Center in Bethlehem, will be at the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) which takes place from 11th to 15th March 2009 in Berlin. Michael speaks English and German. He will participate in the event "Sun, Sand and Sustainable Tourism" on Friday, 13th March, 2009, 11:45 am – 1:30 pm in hall 4.1 and will present the Code of Conduct for Tourism in the Holy Land.

Michael will also be available for interviews and discussions at the EED-Tourism Watch stall no. 202 in hall 4.1. For further information,

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Tourism Watch is a desk of the German Church Development Service (EED), working together with international partners for sustainable and socially responsible tourism. The TourismWatch newsletter is published quarterly.



In German speaking countries, EED Tourism Watch, the Working Group on Tourism & Development (akte) and the Evangelical-Reformed Churches of Berne-Jura-Solothurn in Switzerland endorse the Code of Conduct and promote fairness in tourism in the Holy Land.



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