

# As Human as the Lions of Palestine



By Hani Mourad

It was a brilliant idea! What if we channel the minds of successful people towards humanity and helping people in need? These ideals are the essence of Lions Club International, an international organization that will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. The person asking was Melvin Johns from Chicago, Illinois, USA.

In its 99 years of history, Lions International has become a mighty organization; with over 42,000 clubs and more than 1,400,000 members worldwide. In the Arab world, Lions Clubs are thriving in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. Lions Club Bethlehem City of Peace was re-established in 2009, reviving a well-respected name in Bethlehem that was established as far back as 1956. Those of us old enough to remember have fond memories of their activities. But the old Bethlehem club discontinued its activities in the spring of 1968 when it was requested, like other Lions Clubs in Palestine, to link itself to the Israeli District. Our elders then preferred to disband rather than align themselves with the occupiers.

The organizational aspect of Lions International is built on solid ground. The clubs are very local, tending to the needs of their local communities, and swearing allegiance to their home countries. There are districts, comprising at least 300 clubs, which support and provide assistance to individual clubs, also representing them with the board of international directors. District governors and international directors are voted into office for one year; the same goes for club presidents, however, the latter are allowed to be re-elected for a second year. LCI has a special international foundation that, with the approval of the



Board members of the Lions Club, Bethlehem.



district government, is able to support local clubs. Thus, local clubs that need support can turn to other clubs for help in simpler cases and to the foundation in cases where more substantial aid is needed. This way, each Lions club feels its community's pulse, but when needed, bigger assistance can be attained.

The Bethlehem club was reborn undistricted due to the problematic political situation, but in the spring of 2016 it managed to become part of District 351 that comprises Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine. Lions Club International has approved the entry of the State of Palestine as a member state, and in June 2016, a celebration to raise the Palestinian flag next to those of all other member nations will take place during the international convention in Fukuoka, Japan. Needless to say, we will be there to celebrate this achievement.

Humanitarian aid is what the Lions do, and in Palestine, the Bethlehem and Ramallah clubs do that with joy! They celebrate good deeds while having fun. A group of like-minded, successful individuals pool their resources for the benefit of society and those in need, and enjoy the results. We work locally to raise funds through activities and events that have become so popular that encouraging people to buy tickets and provide support is effortless. The magic happens with the help of good food, and we prepare and serve it ourselves! We have the most popular stand in the Bethlehem Christmas

Lions clubs in district 351 (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine) are growing. More than six new clubs were chartered in 2015. In Palestine the number of members is steadily growing, providing local humanitarian assistance.



*Donation of a specially designed chair for use in kidney dialysis units at the Bethlehem government hospital.*

market with smoked meats, healthy bread, and very good cakes, mixing homemade techniques with procedures that border on industrial production to satisfy people's thirst for good-quality, preservative-free goods. One other yearly event is a BBQ party that has become so popular with families that a new venue must be found to accommodate the numbers. The new venture "healthylicious," a health food fest, was the latest event that attracted over 300 people. This will also become a yearly springtime event.

The money made, plus the donations and sponsorships provided are channeled into supporting local charities, hospitals, and the needy. Moreover, the Lions of Palestine are working hard

to generate significant funds from the Lions Club International Foundation through an initiative pioneered by the Lions Club of Ramallah to support eye care and ophthalmic interventions in Palestine.

The Lions of Palestine are a perfect example of selfless giving, done with joy and pride. They enjoy the company, the group decision-making, and the transparent democracy; elements that work to keep the Lions clubs of Palestine on top of local humanitarian work.

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*Christmas cartons full of food, chocolate, chestnuts, and some cash to pay the electricity bill were donated to poor families at Christmas last year.*