

Palestinian Heritage Center Preserver and Promoter of Palestinian Cultural Heritage

By Maha Saca

The Palestinian Heritage Centre (PHC) was established 1991 in Bethlehem by Mrs. Maha Saca. The Centre's main goal is to promote and preserve the meaning and significance of Palestinian culture and heritage and to preserve, protect, promote and revive this heritage from loss and appropriation, especially the art of embroidery and traditional dress.

In addition to its main goal, other PHC objectives include assisting in the documentation and preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage and history by establishing a professional, permanent exhibition in Bethlehem; promoting Palestinian culture among international tourists and visitors who come to visit the city of Bethlehem; raising awareness regarding Palestinian heritage in an effort to establish dialogue and respect among cultures; offering education and outreach to our local community in Palestine; keeping the culture alive for the young generations of Palestinians; reviving the beauty of Palestinian traditional handicrafts; and empowering Palestinian women, mainly through employment, economic independence, and self-reliance. The PHC provides women with the opportunity to work from home in an effort to keep them close to their families.

The PHC produces fair-trade handmade embroidery crafted by women from villages and refugee camps around the city of Bethlehem. This rich and exclusively female artistic tradition flourished in Palestine until the middle of the last century. The PHC is very keen on preserving this art and providing employment for women from the district of Bethlehem and beyond.

The PHC has produced a series of posters and postcards that present Palestinian dress from various geo-cultural regions. These images represent women in traditional dresses photographed within the religious,

historical, or archaeological settings of their village or region.

The centre and cultural exhibition are located at the northern entrance of Bethlehem and consist of an exhibition of Palestinian traditional dress and jewellery, a traditional living room, a



Traditional tent.

furnished Bedouin tent, a library, an exhibition of traditional household items, and a gift shop.

The centre's gift shop offers samples of Palestinian traditional art, such as purses, wall hangings, pants, blouses, dresses, shawls, etc., all embroidered with traditional motifs and colours that are

also showcased in the centre's postcards, pictures, and videos. The centre also offers handmade crafts such as wood, glass, and mother of pearl. Visitors can dress up in traditional Palestinian attire and take photos in the Bedouin tent.

In order to preserve this heritage and to create a bridge between the past and the present, the centre has revived interest in Palestinian embroidery by renting out traditional Palestinian wedding attire for women and men, and creatively



Manual coffee roaster.

incorporating embroidery on modern clothing.

The PHC is very active locally and internationally (especially in Europe, the United States, and the Arab world) in preserving Palestinian heritage through lectures, workshops, exhibits, shows, and publications.





Palestine traditional costume map.

In 2007 my daughter, Dr. Iman Saca, was the curator of an exhibit on Palestinian traditional costumes and the art of embroidery at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum. The exhibit was up for six months and attracted a large number of visitors. She has also published a book entitled *Embroidering Identities: A Century of Palestinian Costumes*.

Numerous national and international awards have been given to the PHC and its founder for their continuous efforts to revive and protect Palestinian heritage and promote Palestinian culture.

The next main goal is to establish a Palestinian Heritage Centre Museum/ exhibition space that will hold the centre's unique and rare collection of traditional Palestinian attire for men and women and traditional jewellery and headdress, as well as the centre's large collection of traditional household and farming equipment.

We believe that the establishment of a permanent exhibition as part of the present-day PHC in Bethlehem is a priority, and an

obligation, of utmost importance. Through the PHC museum local Palestinians, especially the young generation, will learn about their heritage and take pride in the achievements of their ancestors. Tourists and visitors who flock to Bethlehem regularly will be able to see the richness and achievement of the local population in a permanent exhibit that is organised according to international standards. This will allow the visitor to fully appreciate the exhibited items and their beauty, and experience the cultural achievements of the Palestinian people past and present. We are still seeking funding in order to achieve our goal to establish the museum.

We welcome you to come for a tour of the PHC to experience first-hand the riches of Palestinian heritage. For more information, please visit our website at www.PHC.ps, or contact us at mahasaca@hotmail.com or 059-927-9760.

Mrs. Maha Saca is the founder of the Palestinian Heritage Centre.

