



# Hanwell Friends of Sabastiya

أصدقاء هانويل سبسطية 'حفصة'

Update – March 2020

[hafsa.org.uk](http://hafsa.org.uk)

## 1. Our AGM and 10<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations

Around 70 members came together for HAFSA's ninth Annual General Meeting and a celebration of our tenth birthday on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February.

It was wonderful to have such a good Skype link with Abu Yasser in Sabastiya. His affecting contribution to the proceedings was all the more poignant given that it was only days since the so-called US "Deal of the Century" was announced, causing great distress to the Palestinian people and highlighting the importance of solidarity and support provided by friendship groups such as ours. Two of the young men from the village, Yahya and Amjad, sang and played for us across the miles which was a real treat.

Once the business part of the AGM was over, it was time for the fun part and, most importantly, to raise a glass of bubbly and toast HAFSA founded ten years ago!



This was followed by an interesting and timely talk by friendship and twinning links researcher, Holly Ryan. Folk legend and HAFSA member Leon Rosselson performed two of his self-penned songs, including the moving 'Ballad of Rivka and Mohammad', which was inspired by the killing by the Israeli army of a

Palestinian child who was playing football on the beach in Gaza in 2014.

The HAFSA committee then gathered to cut the celebration cake which featured a picture of the famous Roman ruins located in the centre of Sabastiya. The cake looked great and was light and delicious! We then invited all present to tuck into the plentiful spread kindly provided by members.

Finally, we were entertained by singers Fatima and Julia Katerina, who sang Arabic songs, accompanied by Julia on the oud. They wound up proceedings very fittingly with a heartfelt rendition of the popular Palestinian song, Mawtini (my homeland), written by a Nablus poet.



Huge thanks are due to all who contributed their time and efforts to ensure this was a truly uplifting and joyous occasion – and grateful thanks to all our members who make possible our work in Sabastiya.

## 2. Dates of our forthcoming HAFSA meetings

- Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020 at 4pm
- Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at 2.30pm
- Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 at 10am
- Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 2pm

Please contact us if you'd like to attend.

### **3. Our new HAFSA committee for 2020/21**

*Chair:* Andree Ryan

*Joint Vice-Chairs:* Cathie Bjarnson/Sue O'Dell

*Treasurer:* Deborah Connolly

*Minutes Secretary:* Christine Mill

*Membership & Technical Support:* Mary Short

*Committee Members:* Bunny Veglio, Colin Lomas, Eugene Dalton Ruark, Marjorie Kelly, Nicky Cadisch.

### **4. Visit to Sabra & Shatila refugee camps**

Fatima Helow arranges an annual visit to the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila to highlight the issue of the right of return and to commemorate the dreadful massacres of 1982. If you are interested in visiting please contact Fatima on 07984 599641 for more information.

### **5. Visits to Sabastiya in Spring and Autumn**

Some HAFSA members are planning to visit in early June for the fruit harvest, and then again in the Autumn during the olive harvest. A tour can be organised to suit participants in a pay-as-you-go format, with accommodation as desired. Please email HAFSA if you are interested.

### **6. Andree Ryan writes about a recent meeting with Husam Zomlot, Palestinian Ambassador to the United Kingdom**

"We attended a meeting at the Palestinian mission in Hammersmith called by Palestinian Ambassador Husam Zomlot.

Husam invited all the NGOs and charities working with Palestine and 52 organisations were represented. The meeting was called to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing our work following the result of the UK elections, and how we can cooperate better.

We are facing big challenges as one party has the absolute majority and the free hand to pass any motions put forward by the Israeli Lobby.

What we must do: encourage MPs, especially Tory ones, to visit Palestine and when an MP visits to follow up on their visit. Speak to Tory

MPs especially back benchers and call to their moral compasses. Do they want Britain to stand proud and on the side of justice and abiding with International laws?

Palestine remains a cross party issue and has solid friends in the Tories. We must capitalise on Prince Charles visit to Bethlehem and what he said: that his dearest wish was that Palestinians see "freedom, justice and equality" in the future.

But the most important relationship in the UK remains the people to people one, and it is very strong. We must carry on our work and organise visits and invite Palestinians to come over and speak."



***And finally, a big 'thank you' to all who have supported Hanwell Friends of Sabastiya during the past year. We have achieved a lot together for the village and the recently elected committee is looking forward to more good work throughout 2020 and beyond.***

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