



ACS – American Community Schools of Athens

Leadership & Journalism at ACS Athens Peace and coexistence in the Middle East through the eyes of students

ACS Athens students traveled for six days to Israel and Palestine on May 23-27, motivated by the overwhelming response of the community to a mini-documentary on the Israeli/Palestinian struggle produced in 2009 in cooperation with Newscoop, a media organization based in the US. Dr. Stefanos Gialamas, president of ACS Athens, and Mr John Papadakis, director of Communications, Technology & Enrollment and a student advisor for the project, accompanied four students, two of which had participated in the production of the documentary. Eleventh-graders Zacharo Gialamas, Thombern Alexander Klingert, Ilyana Kotinis and Anastasi Sharp visited schools and universities in the Israeli and Palestinian

territories, talked to local students about their lives, their view of the conflict, their hopes and expectations for the future, and collected more than 15 hours' worth of video material and 1,500 photographs for the creation of a follow-up documentary/journal. The new production will be ready during the 2010-11 school year, as part of the new Leadership & Journalism program of ACS Athens.

Some of the places the ACS Athens group visited included: Al Quds University in East Jerusalem, the Old City of Jerusalem, the Holocaust History Memorial – Yad VaShem, Qurtuba School in Hebron, the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour, a Lutheran School in Talitha Kumi and a Jewish Orthodox School in West Jerusalem. The group also had the chance to tour many of the cultural and religious monuments in Jerusalem and experience the multi-cultural and multi-religious mosaic of modern Israel, while they visited the city of Jericho, the so-called most ancient city of the world, and the Dead Sea, a lake lying at the lowest point on earth (1,300 meters below sea level).



A group photo of our students together with the students they visited at the Orthodox Jewish School in West Jerusalem.

Students met with Dr. Gershon Baskin and Mr. Hanna Siniora (co-directors of the Israeli-Palestinian Center for Research and Information IPCRI) – discussing the perspectives for negotiations and the peace process as it stands now and the importance of Jerusalem in the negotiations. IPCRI is a joint institution of Israelis and Palestinians dedicated to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of "two-states for two peoples" solution. Dr. Baskin – who contributes weekly political op-eds to the Jerusalem Post – holds an MA and a Ph.D.



Our students together with elementary and high school students from Al Qurtuba Palestinian school in Hebron.

in International Affairs and has long been active in the peace Israeli-Arab peace process. Mr. Siniora, a distinguished writer and publisher, is Chairman of East Jerusalem Development Corporation and a Member of the Palestinian National Council (PNC).

Students had a rare opportunity to meet with Mr. Yitzhak Frankenthal, an orthodox Jewish businessman, who has focused his energies on public activities aiming to foster reconciliation, tolerance and peace, after his son was kidnapped and killed by Hamas in 1994. Mr. Frankenthal established the "Par-

ents Circle - Families Forum" – an organization of over 500 bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families sharing a common sentiment: "If we, who have lost our dear ones, do not seek revenge and hatred but reconciliation - so can anyone." Lately Mr. Frankenthal has created the Arik Institute for Reconciliation Tolerance & Peace, named after his son.

During all meetings, ACS Athens students admitted gaining tremendous insight and perspective on one of the most contested, researched and debated issues of human history. Walking through the narrow corridors of the old city of Jerusalem, visiting ancient proto-Christian and Byzantine churches, and local Jewish monuments like the Tomb of King David, the group took advantage of this rare opportunity that their voluntary school program offered as creativity met critical thinking and the thirst for learning.
For more information, pictures and to view the documentary (www.vimeo.com/9064384), you may visit ACS Athens website at www.acs.gr.