

For Immediate Release

## The Palestinian Museum provides visuals for the Pope's visit to Palestine

*The images highlight connections between Palestine and the Holy Land - two places that occupy the same physical space, but very different imaginary landscapes.*

19 May 2014

Ramallah- The Palestinian Museum has been chosen to provide the visuals in honour of Pope Francis's first visit to Palestine next Sunday (25 May). It has created banners to decorate Manger Square and the Dheisheh refugee camp, welcoming the Pope to Palestine with a series of images designed to be thought provoking as well as simply celebratory.

The banners combine recent media photographs of the Palestinian landscape and its people with Western baroque paintings of biblical scenes. The paintings interpret episodes from the life of Christ as a means of glorifying God and spreading His teachings, but the photographs glorify nothing: they simply bear witness to mundane episodes in the often difficult lives of Palestinians today. Juxtaposed, the images explore the tension between popular images of the Holy Land, the birthplace of Christ and the backdrop to Biblical miracles and stories, and ones of Palestine today, which is home to a dwindling Christian population and has an ongoing history of suffering caused by occupation and oppression.

Jack Persekian, director and head curator of the Museum, explains the deeper connections at work between the images: 'Biblical paintings are, among other things, allegories of the Christian values: charity, mercy, compassion, and faith in a just and loving God. And yet these photographs documenting everyday life in Palestine show is a conspicuous absence of Christian compassion, and hope glimpsed only in the courage and humanity of their subjects. The images are totally incongruous - but we can see, in the combinations, not two warring narratives but a single tale of the tension between Christian values and the plight of many of the world's Christians - between the sanctity of the Holy Land and the violence it has suffered.'

In Dheisheh Camp, prints from the UNWRA archive are juxtaposed with present-day photographs of refugees; placed alongside one another, they ask how the lives of Palestinian refugees have changed, or not, in the years following their dispossession. Exodus, exile and

loss have been dominant themes of the Palestinian narrative since 1948, but perhaps equally synonymous with Palestine are words like endurance, survival, and faith – and it is all these qualities that the works seek to recognise.

Perskeian emphasises that the Museum is simply using art to beautify the places the Pope is to visit without disguising the fact that these places, and the people who live in them, face oppression and hardship on a daily basis. “For Palestinians of all creeds”, he adds, “Pope Francis’s visit is a source of hope in difficult times, and the Palestinian Museum is proud and happy to welcome him to Palestine”.

The Palestinian Museum is a flagship project of the Welfare Association, and aims to provide a physical and virtual space for the free exploration, discussion and celebration of Palestinian history, society and culture. The Museum building is currently under construction in Birzeit, and the Museum will open its doors for the first time in 2015.

Ends

**For further information or to set an interview with the Museum’s Director, Jack Persekian, please contact Rana Anani on:**

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**For more information on the Palestinian Museum:**

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