

# The Bethlehem Development Foundation

By Mazen Karam

Aiming to transform Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, into a vibrant international spiritual destination, the Bethlehem Development Initiative was launched in 2011 by the late Said Tawfik Khoury<sup>i</sup>, co-founder of Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), with the late Hassib Jiries Sabbagh. The Foundation was established and blessed by the Palestinian government in 2012 with the support of a group of international and Palestinian philanthropists.

To enable the city to sparkle as a beacon of peace and a unique spiritual destination for pilgrims from all over the world, a strategic action plan with a multitude of projects in eight sectors was developed by Arup of the United Kingdom and Khatib & Alami of Lebanon.

In 2018 the Bethlehem Development Foundation (BDF) concluded its fifth year of operations with a remarkable portfolio of eight vital projects<sup>ii</sup> that include:

- Supporting the restoration of the Church of the Nativity's internal plaster, columns, and external facades
- Rehabilitation of Manger Square, which included the beautification of facades, greening of roofs, and improved nightscape lighting of the buildings that surround Manger Square
- The Christmas Decorations and Festivities on Manger Square from 2012 to 2017. In 2014, Fortune 500 voted the Bethlehem tree number 12 worldwide, and in 2015, the Huffington Post voted it one of the most extravagant and creative trees in the world. World renowned singers and groups have performed at the tree-lighting ceremonies.
- The Said Khoury Sports Complex in Beit Sahour
- The Doha Mini Soccer Playground
- Al-Salam Children's Park in Beit Jala
- The Bethlehem Governorate Solid Waste Management Project, which included a Solid Waste Management Master Plan to the year 2034, collection and compaction vehicles, waste bins of various sizes and shapes, a central maintenance and administration facility, and public awareness campaigns
- Rehabilitation of sanitary units at Omar Mosque at Manger Square

Although vital projects were completed, several await funding or partnering. BDF recently decided to globalize its fundraising efforts and thus approached potential supporters in the United States and Europe.

In February 2018, BDF launched the American Friends of the Bethlehem Development Foundation (AFBDF), dedicated to the restoration and development of the Holy Region of Bethlehem and seeking to establish financial assistance, grassroots support, and recognition for the development of the city of Bethlehem and the restoration and development of the Bethlehem region. Assistance obtained since February 2018 has been overwhelming and has enabled the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity to proceed with major parts of the works.

For more information on past and future projects, goals, and mission, please visit BDF's website at <https://bethlehemdevelopment.org/support/contact-us/>.



Left: Mr. Samer Khoury, chairperson of the board of trustees, launching the American Friends of BDF, February 2018, Washington DC.

Right: Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, vice-chairperson of the board of trustees, addressing AFBDF invitees, New York, October 2018.



Left: Mr. Ziad Al Bandak, chairperson of the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity, briefing AFBDF invitees on the progress of the restoration works at the church, New York, October 2018.

Right: Mr. Mazen Karam, BDF managing director, presenting BDF accomplishments to the AFBDF invitees, New York, October 2018.

Photos courtesy of AFBDF.



<sup>i</sup> For a eulogy, please see "In Memory of Said Khoury," available at <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/limeight/in-memory-of-said-khoury/>.

<sup>ii</sup> For more details, please see articles published by TWIP in previous issues, including "A Vision for Progress," available at <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/a-vision-for-progress-the-bethlehem-development-foundation/>, and "Five Projects that Are Leading Bethlehem into a Brighter Future," available at <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/five-projects-that-are-leading-bethlehem-into-a-brighter-future/>.

