

# Philanthropy, Volunteerism, Charity

## The Cornerstone of Palestinian Steadfastness



By Manal Issa

**P**hilanthropy is an endeavor that Palestinians have always considered their duty, a backbone of steadfastness that goes hand in hand with the struggle for freedom. In its crudest form, philanthropy

is the giving of time, talent, and money. A cornerstone of Palestinian steadfastness, it is practiced spontaneously, with the conscious intention of doing good, occasionally without a label or a name. It is people helping people, contributing to families who lost loved ones or had their homes demolished, and assisting farmers in picking olives, as well as providing for neighbors and extended families when catastrophe attacks their lives. It is the faith that unites us Palestinians in our conviction that we can bring about a free and better future. Initially, the practice focused on giving to individuals in the confidence that this individual would support a family – as families form the core of society. This helped generations of youth exercise steadfastness, remain on the land, contribute to society, and live their lives as proud Palestinians. Giving in order to support steadfastness encouraged volunteerism, spread charity, and inspired further philanthropic giving.

Volunteerism, or giving time and talent, has been an ever-growing phenomenon in Palestinian societies. The 1980s are considered its golden era, with the inception of volunteer communities in diverse locations in Palestine and the birth of the first Intifada (uprising). Then, there were waves in which the practice was discouraged as a consequence of the Oslo Accords. With the influx of foreign aid, volunteerism started to be shaped by remuneration against voluntary hours, as practiced by

international organizations. While this practice diverted volunteerism from its focus, there were always reasons to revive it. The decline of foreign aid to Palestine and the need for humanitarian support prompted people to rekindle their desire to drive social change. Nowadays, creativity in volunteerism is the backbone of youth activism in Palestine. Among such initiatives, there are youth groups that took the lead with trips to remote areas to volunteer by cleaning and fixing public space in villages and ordering homemade meals prepared by working women in the villages. Nonprofit organizations pride themselves on the number of volunteers who serve in their organizations and contribute to social change.

Charity, or giving money and helping individuals, is a practice associated with faith in the three religions of Palestine. In Christianity, the tithe is set at 10 percent of income. Judaism espouses *zedakah* and *ma'sar kesafim* (tithing), while in Islam, *zyakat* obliges individuals to give 2.5 percent of the wealth that has been in their possession

**Acknowledging the significant role of volunteerism in Palestinian societies sheds light on the practice of giving that supports philanthropy and is essential for the communities.**

for a lunar year. Charity correlates with humanitarianism. It is part and parcel of the support to Palestinians that has been essential in helping civilians survive attacks on their lives and the destruction and confiscation of their land and property. The Gaza Strip has been under continuous attack; civilians have faced dramatic human costs with losses of family members, jobs, homes, organizations, even hospitals. Basic needs such as food, shelter, and medical treatment have been supported by charity and humanitarianism. Charity makes a positive impact on supporting



