WITH OUR THANKS

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Gaza Mental Health Foundation
PO Box 380273
Cambridge MA 02238
www.gazamentalhealth.org

The Gaza Mental Health Foundation presents:

INSTILLING HOPE IN GAZA:
THE LEGACY OF DR. EYAD EL SARRAJ
A Memorial Tribute

October 28, 2014

First Parish in Cambridge, Harvard Square

Hosted by The Middle East Education Group at First Parish in Cambridge

Dr. Eyad el Sarraj greets Prof. Noam Chomsky in Gaza, October 2012.
Dr. Eyad el Sarraj was the first psychiatrist in the Gaza Strip. The founder in 1990 of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, he made helping people move beyond their personal and collective suffering to recognize the basic humanity of all human beings his life’s work.

Human rights and mental health went hand in hand for a man who, as a four year old, was forced to flee with his family from Bir al-Saba’ (now Beersheva) to Gaza when the State of Israel was established.

In April 1997, when he was in Boston to receive the first Human Rights Award given by the Physicians for Human Rights USA, he told The Boston Globe that “I started as a physician in Gaza and did not want to be involved in politics. But many of my patients were victims of torture and I became drawn into advocacy. Defending human rights is my major obsession.”

In his research, writings, talks, media interviews and meetings with world leaders, he warned of the long-term consequence for children - and the ominous implications for Israel - of the violence and trauma of the occupation. As he wrote in a New York Times op ed during the Israeli military invasion of 2008-9, “Israel will eventually stop the war and we may be saved, but who will save Israel from itself?”

In addition to overseeing the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme as it developed training programs and innovative ways of providing mental health services to people living in a state of chronic emergency, Dr. el Sarraj served as Commissioner General of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens Rights in the mid 1990s. In that role, he criticized the human rights practices not just of the Israeli occupiers, but of the Palestinian Authority, which had him arrested on three occasions.

After being severely beaten in prison, he later gave counseling to the guards who had participated in his beating, and who had themselves been tortured in Israeli prisons.

His courage, decency, independence of mind, wisdom and vision of a better world were to make him a beacon of moral conscience and hope for those Israelis seeking peace with Palestinians and Palestinians struggling with both the occupation and their own ruinous political divisions.

These qualities earned him the 1998 Martin Ennals Award for human rights. In 2010, when he was already ill with multiple myeloma, he was awarded both the Olof Palme Prize and the Juan José López-Ibor Prize in Psychiatry.

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