The World Archaeological Congress Inter-Congress on Structural Violence was held in Ramallah, Palestine from 8th to 13th August, 2009. There have been reports that WAC banned Israeli archaeologists from attending this Inter-Congress. These reports are untrue.

A public discussion forum has been established as a way of exploring the issues surrounding these reports.

The Ramallah Inter-Congress was widely advertised. Information was on the WAC website and in the WAC newsletter for more than 12 months, and was distributed multiple times on a number of archaeological list-serves, including the WAC list-serve, which has some 3,000 members globally. The conference organisers invited a number of Israeli archaeologists to attend and all Israeli members of WAC were regularly informed of the conference. However, some non-members who could have legitimately expected individual notification of the Inter-Congress were not notified. This includes the Israel Antiquities Authority, which has sent a letter of protest.

The topic of the conference was structural violence, the use of institutional power to marginalise individuals or groups. Racism, sexism and ageism are examples of structural violence. The genesis of the Ramallah Inter-Congress was in discussions around people who had been refused a visa to attend the WAC-5 Congress, held in Washington DC in 2003. The WAC Inter-Congress on Structural Violence was held in Palestine largely because Palestinian people have great difficulties getting visas to many countries. Since it is difficult for Palestinian archaeologists to interact with the international community, WAC decided to bring members of the international community to Palestinian archaeologists.

It is unfortunate that some archaeologists who wished to attend the Inter-Congress in Ramallah were not able to do so. The Vice-President of WAC, who is from Nigeria, was refused a visa to enter Jordan and a woman from Turkey was refused a visa to enter the West Bank by the Israeli authorities, despite having travelled as far as Jordan. In addition, some Israeli archaeologists who would have liked to attend the Inter-Congress did not. Israeli citizens are prevented by military order from entering Area A in Occupied Palestinian Territory and lawyers informed the organisers that this situation applied to Israeli archaeologists as well. However, we have subsequently been informed that Israeli archaeologists could have been issued a travel permit to attend the Inter-Congress. Naturally, we are delighted that this is the case. We wish that the current world situation would allow for all archaeologists to feel free to participate in this and any of the WAC Inter-Congresses.

The difficulties that the Ramallah Inter-Congress pose for Israeli archaeologists also apply to Palestinian archaeologists, some of whom have lived in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem all their lives, but are not able to visit many parts of the West Bank or Jerusalem because of the Israeli Military's checkpoints and closures. While Palestinians with Jerusalem Identity cards are free to enter Israel and the occupied areas of Jerusalem, those who carry

Palestinian identity cards and reside in other parts of the West Bank and the Gaza strip can only enter these areas if they have obtained a special permit from the Israeli Military Authorities. However, the events surrounding this Inter-Congress suggest that these barriers can be breached if a concerted effort is made sufficiently in advance to obtain official permission.

Throughout the world, there remain many barriers to the free participation of all archaeologists in global meetings. Some of these barriers are political, many are economic, and some are social. The World Archaeological Congress supports the efforts of any scholars seeking to break down these barriers.

The Inter-Congress at Ramallah was a global conference that dealt with global affairs, though it also considered issues local issues, as with any conference. Much of the discussion focused on how to care for cultural heritage more effectively.

There is an urgent need for more books, more training and programs that promote greater public appreciation of the cultural heritage of the region. Palestinian archaeologists need help from the global community in three main areas. They need assistance with building the archaeology and cultural heritage collections of their institutional libraries and they need help with developing educational opportunities for their young people. They need assistance also with developing community education programs, which are the most effective way of preventing the looting of archaeological sites. WAC will be assisting in this endeavour through our Global Libraries and our Archaeologists without Borders programs, and by establishing a fund dedicated to building the cultural heritage capacity in Palestine.

The World Archaeological Congress looks forward to organising another forum in which these issues are discussed by all Palestinian and Israeli archaeologists. A suitable subject could be that of developing a joint vision for what the priorities for archaeology and cultural heritage might be on 'Day One', when an agreement between Israel and Palestine has been reached.

WAC encourages members of the public, as well as WAC members, to post their views and ideas in this discussion forum

Claire Smith, President

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