

# Rebuilding Alliance

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## **TO SAVE HOMES, PALESTINIAN CHILDREN SHARE VISIONS OF PEACE WITH CONGRESS**

**September 19<sup>th</sup> International Peace Day Senate briefing at 10:30-am in the Capitol Bld. SVC 212-10**

**Sep. 14, 2017 Washington DC** — Palestinian children from West Bank villages and from Gaza will share their vision of peace with Congress, to commemorate International Peace Day. Joining the children will be human rights defenders including Rabbi Arik Ascherman from the Israeli human rights group, Torah Tzedek. On behalf of their villages of Susiya, Al Aqaba, and Gaza City, the children are asking Americans to urge their Senators and Representatives, as friends of Israel, to press the Government of Israel to stop the demolitions of Palestinian communities, recognize Palestinian planning rights, assure due process, and turn on the lights in Gaza.

- **Please join them on Tuesday, September 19<sup>th</sup> at 10:30-11:30am for a public briefing in the Capitol Building SVC 212-10 (Senate side).**
- **Following the briefing, all are invited to the Rayburn House Office Building, Rayburn Foyer from 1:00-5:00pm for the U.S. premiere of the art exhibition, We All Live in Gaza: Art Under Siege.** The reception will begin at 1:30pm with a presentation by curator Maurice Jacobsen and a few words from the children. Light refreshments will be served.

*"Israeli Defense Minister Avidgor Liberman recently stated that he intends to 'wipe Susya and Khan Al Akhmar off the map.' So I come to Washington to plead for the lives of these Palestinian villages,"* said Rabbi Arik Ascherman, founder of Torah Tzedek, an Israeli human rights organization. *"This year, International Peace Day coincides with Rosh HaShana. Jewish tradition teaches that God decides the fate of every human soul for the coming year on this day and 'Who shall live and who shall die' also applies to villages. I urge the U.S. administration to safeguard the future of Palestinian communities such as Susya."*

These Palestinian children are among thousands of children in the U.S. and around the world who are making [Pinwheels for Peace](#), writing what peace means to them and drawing what peace looks like, then forming a pinwheel that turns in the wind. This is the third year Rebuilding Alliance, an American non-profit dedicated to rebuilding war-torn communities and bringing the world together to keep them safe, is holding the #ICareAboutPeace Congressional Briefing.

*"I want Congress to keep my village safe and standing,"* said Aysar, age 15, from Susiya, *"Because a brave Senator took action, Susiya's demolition orders were put on hold."*

As soon as October 1<sup>st</sup>, Israel's Minister of Defense, Avigdor Lieberman, will state the Government of Israel's position to Israel's High Court as the justices consider the Palestinian Village of Susiya's petition to overturn the denial of their master plan. Despite the villagers' undisputed title to their land, the Israeli High Court will then decide Susiya's fate, either recognizing their right to plan and build on the land they own or ordering demolition of their homes. [Senator Feinstein's letters](#) to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu have been instrumental in keeping Susiya standing so far.

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### **About the Delegation:**

**Aysar (15)** has lived his whole life in Susiya. Since he was little, he always accompanied his uncle Nasser Nawaja, who works with the Israeli Human Rights group, B'Tselem, to help film the incidents with the Israeli army and the settlers in the South Hebron Hills. Despite Aysar's young age, he has a deep insight into the local situation, and he is also a huge help for both his parents. He gets up at five o'clock in the morning to feed all the animals, herd the sheep, and help his father with his daily chores, since he is undergoing cancer treatment. Due to Susiya being surrounded by both settlements and a military camp, when the children walk to school they are under constant risk of harassment by the Israeli army and settlers. Aysar always stands up for the other children and does his best to protect and comfort them on the daily 1.5 mile walk to school.

**Tia (12)** is a 12-year-old student from Gaza City. She is currently in the seventh grade at the American International School in Gaza, where she is getting straight A's. All families in Gaza are experiencing massive rolling blackouts for up to 22 hours per day in an extreme energy crisis that has grown progressively worse over the past 10 years.

**Shadi (10)** is in the fourth grade and plays violin as part of the Collective Song Music Program in Al Aqaba under the direction of teachers from the Edward Said National Music Conservatory. Shadi and his family live in one of the first "Rebuilding to Remain" homes, designed with the returning villagers and crowd-funded by Rebuilding Alliance under building permits issued by the Al Aqaba Village Council. Al Aqaba is the first Palestinian village in Area C to issue its own building permits. Though the Israeli Army issued demolition orders in 2004 against Al Aqaba's kindergarten, the medical clinic, and most homes in Al Aqaba, the Israeli High Court ruled that 'for the time being, the center of the village will remain standing' and because of that the new homes are standing, free of demolition orders.

**Rabbi Arik Ascherman** is the founder of Torat Tzedek, a new Israeli human rights organization founded to (1) strive for a society that honors God's Image in every human being, and for the human rights that this necessitates; and (2) educate our society that honoring God's image in every human being, protecting human rights and taking concrete action to further these goals is a human and religious obligation in general, and in particular a Jewish religious obligation. At the request of the Palestinian Village of Susiya, Rabbi Ascherman is part of their negotiation and legal advisory team since the village first began their zoning and planning plan process some seven years ago. Internationally recognized as leading advocate for human rights and social justice, he served as co-director of Rabbis For Human Rights, executive director from 1998-2010, and co-founder of Haqel and has received numerous awards and recognition for his human rights work.

**Donna Baranski-Walker** is Founder & Executive Director of [Rebuilding Alliance](#), and an MIT engineer with an M.S. from the U. of Hawaii. Rebuilding Alliance and Donna have been awarded Special Congressional Recognition by Rep. Barbara Lee, Rep. Anna Eshoo, and Rep. Loretta Sanchez. In 2016, Donna was awarded Rotary District 5150's Service Award and the Rachel Corrie Conscience And Courage Award from American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of Orange County. In 2010, on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Polish Solidarity movement, Donna was awarded the Medal of Gratitude before 26,000 people. She began her work in the Middle East in 1990 with a New York Times op-ed, "[Small Lights in the Darkness](#)," which was translated into Arabic and presented to the Iraqi Women's Federation just before the First Gulf War began.

