

## Joining forces for a safe space to play

### Children demand their right to play on Universal Children's Day

**26<sup>th</sup> of November 2011** - On a sunny day in Shu'fat camp about 300 children gathered to participate in a variety of activities that were organized to celebrate Universal Children's Day. The atmosphere is joyful; clowns are playing fun tricks, children are showing off their craft skills and the capoeira corner is drawing a lot of attention.



"I especially loved the capoeira and the stamp banner, I felt free to do what I want" (Aya, 13)

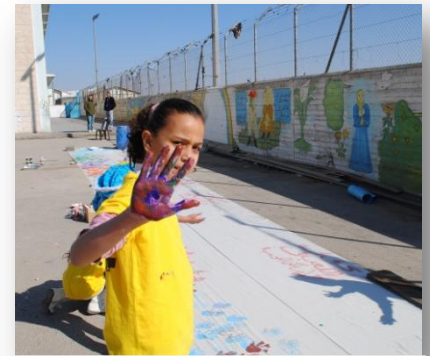
The reality outside the UNRWA girls' school, where the event is taking place, is different. An estimated 18 000 people live in the camp, of which about 36 per cent are below the age of fourteen (UNRWA). Children are bound to play in the streets, which are littered and unpaved. The camp is bursting at the seams due to overcrowding, and criminality is widespread. Shu'fat is the only West Bank camp that lies within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. Many children attend other schools outside the camp, which means they have to cross Israeli military checkpoints every day.

But Saturday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, is a special day. We invited children, volunteers and other organisations working in Shu'fat to join us to celebrate the anniversary of the Convention of the

Rights of the Child, the milestone of our work for children worldwide.

Many of the children present are part of a child resilience programme that is being implemented by Save the Children in partnership with MA'AN Development Center in 7 schools in Jerusalem. "We try to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children by organizing sessions in the schools that focus on child resilience. Due to the tense situation in Jerusalem and the lack of space, both parents and teachers often resort to violence. We want to support the schools to create a protective learning environment, and help the children to develop positive coping skills, enabling them to face their problems. Events like the one of today are an important tool to help us advocate against violence in schools".

The theme of the day is **'the right to learn and play in a safe environment'**, and it was chosen by the people who work directly with the children. "We wanted to organize a fun day for the children in order to let them escape from their daily routine", Sophie from Maan Development Center says, "That is why all the organizations working with children in the camp joined efforts to make this day happen. **By working together we want to emphasize the need for cooperation to end the spiral of violence children are exposed to and continue fighting for the respect of children's rights.**"



"I loved the banner activity most because the hands were over each other showing that we are united" (Wala, 13)

### About the Child Resilience Programme

With funding from Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MA'AN Development Center (MA'AN) along with Save the Children in Palestine are piloting a school based psychosocial support programme in seven schools in East Jerusalem. The programme focuses on a new approach aimed at improving children's psychosocial wellbeing in a prolonged conflict situation. The overall objective of this programme is to enhance the access of Palestinian children to quality and protective educational opportunities through specifically targeting East Jerusalem children and their families. The programme uses a nonclinical psychosocial and protection methodology that focuses on children's positive coping skills and resilience.