

**27 APRIL 2009**  
**PRESS RELEASE**

**CHARITY SCREENING: ARNA'S CHILDREN**  
**7.30 pm, 14<sup>TH</sup> May 2009**

A Charity Screening of Arna's Children will be held at Aberystwyth Arts Centre on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May. There will be a reception in the foyer at 7.30pm, followed by an introduction by Aberystwyth's Mayor Sue Jones Davies at 8pm. The screening will begin at 8.15pm. The event is in aid of developing the relationship between the Freedom Theatre, West Bank, Palestine and the Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

Arna's Children is a Palestinian documentary film directed by Juliano Mer Khamis and Danniell Danniell about a children's theatre group in Palestine. Arna Mer-Khamis, a Palestinian Jewish woman, was a legendary activist for the rights of the Palestinian people. She helped establish a children's theatre group in Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. After her death in 1994, the project was abandoned. Her son Juliano, a well-known actor in Israeli television and the director for the group, filmed Arna working with the children. Following Arna's death, he returns to the camp to find out what became of the young refugees. Yusef committed a suicide attack in Hadera, 2001. Ashraf was killed in the battle of Jenin by the Israeli army and Alla led a group of resistance fighters to his death in 2003.

One of the greatest tragedies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequences it has for children - the most innocent and vulnerable members of society. Isolated from the world and subject to nightly incursions by the Israeli Army, the children of Palestine are growing up amidst a seemingly endless cycle of violence and oppression. Living with chronic fear, depression and often deeply traumatised, they are largely deprived of a normal childhood in which to play, experiment, and develop a healthy and meaningful sense of themselves and their surroundings.

The Freedom Theatre's aim is to provide the children and youth of Jenin Refugee Camp with a safe space in which they are free to express themselves and in which they can develop skills, self-knowledge and confidence. The Freedom Theatre's unique programme includes workshops and activities in theatre, supporting arts and multi-media, ranging in emphasis from therapy and healing, to the presentation of high-quality artistic products. Through its work The Freedom Theatre empowers and gives voice to the children of Jenin Refugee Camp, enabling them to challenge present realities and to reach out beyond the limits of their own community.

The link between the Arts Centre and Freedom Theatre was established by Jacob Gough. Jacob is from Aberystwyth and is only 23 years old. Inspired by a documentary about the treatment of Palestinian protestors by the Israeli army Jacob determined to leave the safety of his home town and

travel to Palestine. His experiences whilst there, and the people he met, strengthened his commitment to work to achieve change in an area of the world blighted by conflict. In a context of almost daily violence and aggression, young Palestinians' experiences and perceptions of the world are increasingly shaped by frustration, trauma and feelings of impotence and hopelessness. Jacob left his job at the Arts Centre to work for The Freedom Theatre and human rights groups operating in the West Bank. He feels strongly that through the work of The Freedom Theatre it is possible to bring significant improvements to the lives of young people in the Jenin Refugee Camp, helping them to break free from the insidious cycle of despair and violence. Using his skills as a theatre technician Jacob joined The Freedom Theatre to assist their development as a professional venue. Photos illustrating Jacob's work at The Freedom Theatre and experiences in Palestine will be on display at the reception. A question and answer session with Jacob will be held after the screening.

The event will help to raise money for the Freedom Theatre and to hopefully bring two of the young people from Jenin Refugee Camp to Aberystwyth Arts Centre for a month. During their stay the Arts Centre will provide them with technical training. The skills that they learn will help them assist The Freedom Theatre to further develop as a professional venue for theatre and arts in the north of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Tickets for this event are FREE and can be booked by contacting the Arts Centre ticket office on 01970 62 32 32 or online at [www.aber.ac.uk/artscentre](http://www.aber.ac.uk/artscentre)

There will be a collection on the door and donations are welcome. All proceeds will go towards developing the link between the Freedom Theatre and the Arts Centre.

Notes to editors:

Further information is available from Rachel Taylor on 01970 622889 email [rst@aber.ac.uk](mailto:rst@aber.ac.uk)

Further Aberystwyth Arts Centre press releases can be found at [www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk/press.shtml](http://www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk/press.shtml).