



Dear Friends of Hope Flowers School,

Greetings from Hope Flowers School, Bethlehem, the Palestinian territories.

We hope that you and your families are healthy and safe.

On behalf of the students and staff of the Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem (HFS), I would like to thank you for your solidarity and support for Hope Flowers School.

The COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed to have spread to the West Bank on 5 March 2020. The Palestinian Health Ministry has now confirmed that the number of cases is 119 with more than 12000 in quarantine.

The PA implemented a lockdown that started in Bethlehem on March 6th, 2020 where the first major outbreak took place, which was later extended to the entire West Bank. This measure included closing all schools, public and private businesses and institutions for one month. Since then, Bethlehem has been under strict isolation measures. The Israeli army has imposed a strict closure on all of the West Bank and people cannot move between Palestinian areas nor can they enter into Israel. Over 65,000 Palestinians from the West Bank that work in the construction industry in Israel cannot go to work and have lost their jobs. These workers are considered a high risk factor for contributing to the rapid spread of the virus, be it in the West Bank or Israel, due to their high number, daily crowding at crossings and checkpoints and their contact with people on both sides of the border.

This situation is affecting HFS and our children at the school in several ways:

- **Increased unemployment**–The average unemployment in the Palestinian territories before the COVID-19 crisis was 27%. While the average unemployment among parents of the HFS was 30%. Many of the parents were working as daily workers in Israel. We expect the number of unemployed parents to increase rapidly.
- **Increased Poverty** - The United Nations reported before outbreak of COVID-19 that 50% of Palestinian people were classified as poor while 66% of the Palestinian people suffered of food insecurity. We expect this number to also increase rapidly.

The current situation and expected deterioration will have dramatic effects on HFS. **We will be forced to cut back or cancel basic, important services that make a huge difference in the lives of Palestinian children**, including:

- **The Child protection Program (CPP)** that provides education, psycho-social counseling, hot meals and recreational activities for 90 selected children (6-12 years old) from the Bethlehem area who have been affected by violence and/or living in difficult circumstances. The project has taken into consideration the special needs of these children and provides them with special education and rehabilitation services. CPP responds also to the urgent needs of children like clothing, health, etc.



- **Scholarships:** Many of the parents at our school cannot afford the basic needs of their children. HFS provides 100 full and partial scholarships at the beginning of this scholastic year for children from less privileged families and orphans. Once unemployment rises, we expect that more parents and families will be unable to afford not only the school fees for their children but also basic needs like food, clothing and medication.
- **Hot meals for malnourished children:** For many of our students, HFS is their only source of hot meals. As the current crisis continues, the number of children who do not receive hot meals at home will increase. Many have not eaten a hot meal since the school was temporarily closed earlier this month. This will not only affect their nutrition, but also their health, wellbeing and academic performance. The menu at HFS includes milk and fruit for breakfast (lots of children come to the school even without breakfast); a hot meal for lunch (including vegetables and either meat, chicken or fish).
- **School operation** - This situation will also affect HFS' ability to pay teacher and staff salaries. 80% of the school's running expenses have been paid by your generous donations.

We appreciate and understand the hardships facing our friends around the world. At this time, we ask that in the middle of your hardship, please continue your solidarity and support of HFS at whatever amount you can. You will be making a huge difference in the lives of Palestinian children, HFS and our local community.

Sincerely yours,

Ibrahim Issa,
Director, the Hope Flowers School