

AVSI-USA NEWS

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AVSI-USA IS PART OF THE AVSI NETWORK

AVSI-USA Mission: To support the AVSI network by leveraging resources and contacts in the U.S. in order to enhance and broaden the achievements of member organizations in promoting human dignity in developing countries.

Region in Focus: AVSI in the Middle East

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AVSI's presence in the region began after the first Gulf War with emergency interventions in Iraq. It has since flourished into a number of projects in various sectors, each offering tangible help to the marginalized populations throughout the area.

Pope Benedict XVI visits AVSI Supported Center for the Disabled in Jordan

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On his first visit as Pope to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict XVI visits the Our Lady of Peace Center, an AVSI supported community center for people with disabilities in Amman, Jordan. The visit was an opportunity for the Pontiff to share an important message with Catholics around the world as well as to offer direct words to the beneficiaries in the audience.

Water: the Source of Coexistence in Lebanon

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AVSI's recent participation in a conference at the University of Notre Dame in Beirut, Lebanon, was an occasion to share results and lessons learned from an intervention in southern Lebanon focused on a collective irrigation system among small farmers. The now completed project in the Marjayoun plain is only a small part of the on-going history of AVSI in Lebanon.

Palestine: Learning to Educate *with* the Family

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AVSI uses an international seminar in Bethlehem to tackle the difficult context facing education by discussing ways to effectively engage the family in a child's education. Various partners in AVSI Palestine's educational initiatives determine a method for social workers to effectively reach out to parents and families.

Around the World: Recent Public Events Featuring AVSI

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From Brazil, to Argentina and Italy, AVSI engages with numerous stakeholders and others to share lessons learned from projects spanning many sectors and several continents. Topics touched upon include agriculture, healthcare and nutrition, and economic development.

AVSI Wins Photo Competition in Uganda

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AVSI took first prize in a photography competition sponsored by the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP), a collaborator and funder.

A Letter from Puerto Rico: Gala for Gaza

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Friends in Puerto Rico organize a magnificent Gala dinner to raise awareness and funds for the suffering people of Gaza Strip. Not only was the event a success, but the organizers learned a lot along the way.

Region in Focus: the Middle East

Beginning in 1991 after the first Gulf War, AVSI's presence in the Middle East began with an emergency relief project in Iraq and has since continued to grow. In 1996, AVSI established a permanent office in Beirut, Lebanon after beginning a healthcare initiative there. In 2003, the Amman, Jordan office opened its doors to manage projects for people with disabilities and workforce and community development.

AVSI implements projects in a variety of sectors including health, water, education, agriculture, economic development and social support. The projects and interventions are built on a strong network of local organiza-



tions that has developed over time and through close relationships facilitated by on-the-ground staff.

Across the region, AVSI's projects share the potential to unite diverse religious and ethnic communities; the projects serve Muslims and Christians, focusing on the commonly held desire for peaceful and sustained development rather than religious differences. In this humble way, AVSI hopes to contribute to peace and stability that will allow the peoples of the region to move forward.

A brief look at AVSI's recent projects and related events in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine provides insight into AVSI's unique position in the development of the Middle East. ■

The Pope Visits AVSI Supported Center for the Disabled in Jordan

The **Our Lady of Peace Center**—a center for people with disabilities located in **Amman, Jordan**—had the privilege of welcoming Pope Benedict XVI as a distinguished guest on May 8, 2009 during the stop on his pilgrimage throughout the Middle East.

The Our Lady of Peace Center, welcomes disabled youth without discrimination according to ethnicity or religion. This resource and training center was greatly desired by Bishop Salim Sayegh of Amman since 2002 as a welcom-

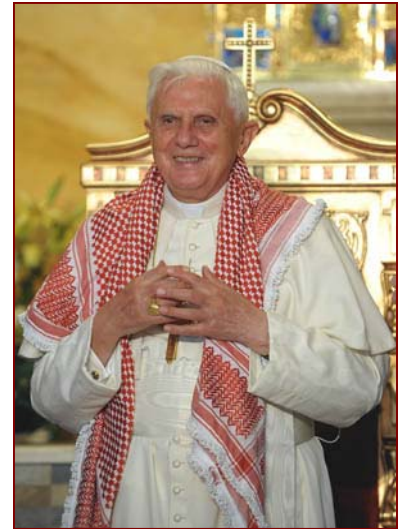
ing place for the disabled to receive education, job training, physical therapy and other forms of assistance including outreach activities. AVSI is proud to have contributed equipment and other forms of support to the Center since 2003, within the framework of a multi-year program "Improving the Life Conditions of People with Physical Disabilities through ITC" (see AVSI-USA News, February 2007). AVSI continues to support the Center with technical assistance.

The program (2003-2008) was implemented by AVSI in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Al Hussein Society for the Physically Challenged and the Ministry of Social Development of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed by many of the youth who participate in activities at the Center. The Pontiff shared a special message particularly addressed to the Center's beneficiaries; see Page 3 for a selection of this address. ■

The Pope's Words at the Our Lady of Peace Center

"I know that the journeys that have led many of you to the "Regina Pacis" Center have been marked by suffering or trial. Some of you struggle courageously with disabilities, others of you have endured rejection, and some of you are drawn to this place of peace simply for encouragement and support.... Your experience of trials, your witness to compassion, and your determination to overcome the obstacles you encounter, encourage me in the belief that suffering can bring about change for the good.... Of particular importance, I know, is the Center's great success in promoting the rightful place of the disabled in society and in ensuring that suitable training and opportunities are provided to facilitate such integration. For this foresight and determination you all deserve great praise and encouragement!"



Water: Source of Coexistence in Lebanon

AVSI Lebanon recently had the opportunity to participate in a conference hosted at the **University of Notre Dame, Beirut**. The conference, held March 31, 2009, was attended by several important guests including Alain Tabourian, Director General of the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water, various local and foreign development technicians as well as academics. The purpose of the seminar was to report on the completion of a series of interventions in Lebanon, mainly financed by Italy, to rebuild infrastructure after the Lebanon-Israel War of 2006. AVSI was a featured presenter among others and highlighted lessons learned from its projects through 2008 in the Marjayoun plain in southern Lebanon.

Project Background

Across five small towns in the Marjayoun region, AVSI planned and implemented multifaceted interventions which improved the farming

capacity and productivity of local farmers by rehabilitating the irrigation systems, advising farmers on more profitable crops, and establishing a network among farmers to help commercialize their products. In addition, AVSI provided psycho-social support to school children, upgraded 10 primary schools and contributed to the economic and social development of the families of the area which has also witnessed a population drain towards the big cities since the war.

Some of the most dramatic results of the project were seen in the development of the irrigation system. From the beginning, AVSI found itself working in a challenging context. The project worked in an area along the Litani River and the Al Dardara spring, that for decades has been home to the Christians of the village of Qlaiaa on one side and the Shiite Muslims

of Khiam on the other. While both groups came from strong agricultural backgrounds, between the two populations lay 1,000 hectares of abandoned land that could not be farmed properly.

In order to reclaim the land for cultivation and improve the farmers' access to water, AVSI suggested a plan to reinforce the river banks and lay several kilometers of underground piping to replace makeshift canals. The plan would require the two groups to work together to maintain the new irrigation system and to shift the dominating mentality of unregulated water usage. Prior to AVSI's intervention, the Christian and Muslim farmers saw each other only as competitors, each staking claim to his water without thinking of the other.

In the initial phases of work, AVSI met with 50 local farmer

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Water: Source of Coexistence, continued

representatives of both groups to discuss the possible scope and implementation of the idea. The immediate reaction was one of total unwillingness. The prevailing mindset and deeply rooted religious tension made working together a near impossibility. The Muslims and Christians both argued that they would break the pipes before using them together.

Results

In the end and only after patient consultations and meetings, water did prove to be the “source of coexistence”. The farmers eventually agreed to run the risk to endorse and involve themselves in

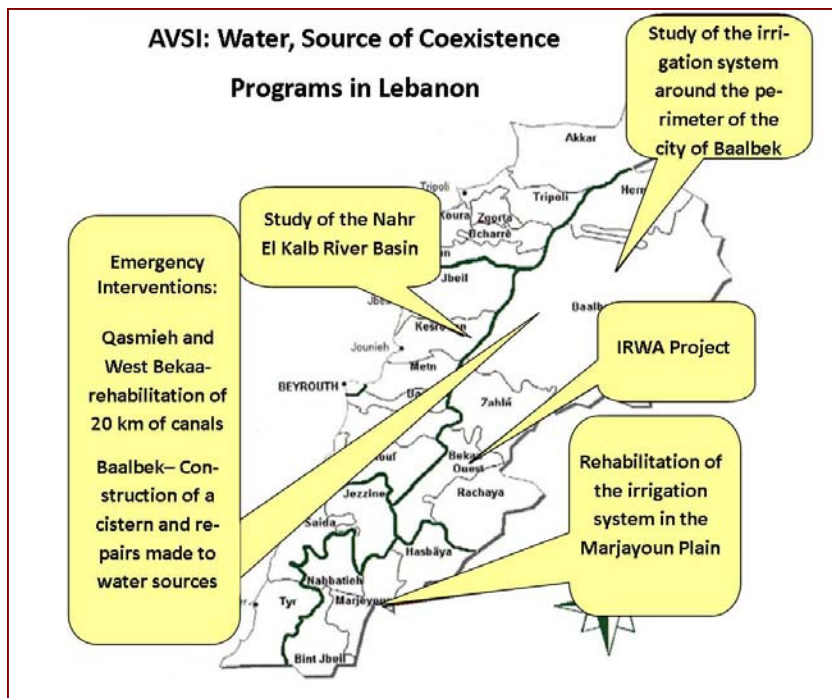
the proposal and formed a management committee to effectively use and share the new water system. In doing so, they were able to preserve 50% of their previous water usage and therefore irrigate 40% more land. The most striking result was the ability for the Muslims and Christians to live and work together in a mutually beneficial way.

Surprisingly, the same farmers who wanted to destroy the pipes later began asking AVSI to help them build a new canal to share. The project claims to have

benefited around 40,000 people as the farmers, their families, and communities have all been impacted by the increased economic possibilities the water has brought.

Coexistence” that AVSI launched in 2006 in the aftermath of the war, drawing on its consolidated experience in Lebanon and international contacts. With this program AVSI, well aware of the critical and

delicate role that water availability and management plays in the region, intends to turn the “water management” challenges and risks into an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and peaceful relationships among diverse groups and people. In this sense the story and the outcome of the Marjayoun project are a clear



Impact and Extension

At the same conference Fadi Comair, the former General Director of the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon, expressed AVSI’s concern in the Marjayoun initiative: “The culture of water should become an instrument of peace in the Middle East. It is in living together that people understand how to share themselves and live with each other with trust, respect, and prosperity.”

In fact, the Marjayoun project is part of a larger program referred to as **“Water: Source of**

example and encouragement to move forward in this direction. “Water Source of Coexistence” relies on and pulls together the contribution and expertise of people from various Lebanese and international bodies including government and non-government institutions and agencies, universities, and the private sector. Among the other projects of the “Water: Source of Coexistence” program is the on-going study of the Nahr El Kalb River in the area of Kesrouan and Nahr El Beiruth river basins with the prospective of fostering environmental protection,

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agriculture usage and water supply to more than 500,000 inhabitants in the peri-urban areas of Beirut. In addition, about 12 miles of canals have been rehabilitated for irrigation in Qasmieh and West Bekaa and a 3 million cubic meter water tank was constructed to provide water for the city of Baalbeck.



An example of a rehabilitated canal from AVSI's interventions along the Litani River

AVSI's History in Lebanon

Even before the 2006 war, AVSI had been deeply engaged in the water and agricultural sectors in the country. From 2003 to 2008, AVSI was the lead partner of a consortium with the Litani River Authority in Lebanon, the Spanish NGO CESAL and local organizations, in the implementation of the Lebanese component (Bekaa Valley) of the regional "Improvement of Irrigation Water Management" (IRWA) program in Lebanon and Jordan, financed by the European Union. Results of the IRWA include: the creation of a service center for farmers, the stabilization of river banks to help with flood control, cleaning of the river beds between Qaraun Lake and bar Elias, training sessions on water usage, and further development of the irrigation system. As a result, 600 hectares of land were reclaimed for cultivation, 20 km of canals were rehabilitated and more than 2,000 farmers were trained in better farming techniques.

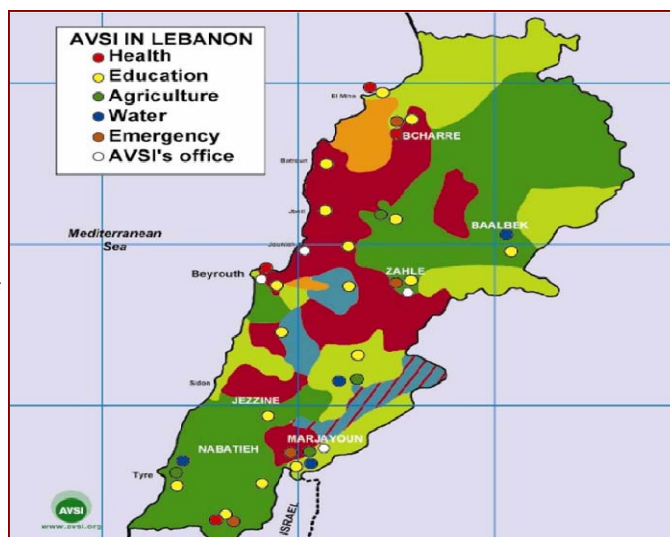
AVSI's presence in Lebanon began in 1996 with interventions in the health sector. Three years later, in 1999, AVSI entered the agricultural sector with the creation of a service and extension center benefiting more than 200 local farmers in the mountainous area of Qartaba over Byblos, north of Beirut.

Current Programs

Today, AVSI has offices throughout the country, including in Beirut,

Jounieh, Zahle and Marjayoun and continues its work in the education, agriculture, water supply and management and environmental sectors. Education is a consistent and cross-cutting focus of AVSI's work in Lebanon. Currently 1,500 Lebanese children are supported annually through AVSI's Distance Support Program which provides mainly educational interventions carried out with 15 local Lebanese organizations. Also in 2006 following the war, AVSI was able to build upon the relationships with Lebanese schools and local organizations to help social workers, teachers and parents respond to the needs of children who were exposed to the trauma of war.

Other recent activities of AVSI in Lebanon include the opening of an olive oil production facility in Alma Ash Shaab, located in the province of Tyre, in November 2008. Today, the facility serves as a concrete reference point for 4,000 farmers around and their income in an area where the landscape of limited economic opportunities continues to push many to migrate north or outside of Lebanon. ■



Palestine: Learning to Educate *with* the Family

“To Work *with* the Family and not *for* the Family” was the theme of AVSI’s education seminar hosted June 5th and 6th in Bethlehem at the Ephpheta Institute. Presented to an international audience, the seminar was given by AVSI and other implementing partners in the project “Education and Training as responses to the emergency situation of the population living in Palestinian territory”.

The seminar offered the possibility for educators, teachers and social workers to understand how to engage the family in the education of the child—a question that has been brought to the forefront of the educational experience offered in AVSI sponsored schools. In order to answer this question, Alberto Piatti, Secretary General of AVSI Foundation, started the conference off with an introduction to the project. Participating schools were also

given time to present their experiences and valuable insight. Through group discussion sessions in the two day seminar, educators worked through important questions focusing on the role of the social worker, the teacher and the family.

AVSI supports a number of schools founded and operated by Christian religious organizations throughout Israel and Palestine. The schools are located in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho and Gaza. The Holy Land High School of the Custody of the Holy Land—the oldest Christian school in Jerusalem founded by the Franciscan friars in 1645—is among those supported by AVSI. A similar school for girls, founded in 1848 by the Franciscan friars is now run by the Missionary Sisters of Charity and receives AVSI support. Staff and faculty from many of the AVSI sponsored schools participated in the seminar.

The current situation in Palestine creates a context marked by many obstacles and hardships, especially in terms of education. Many children are not afforded the opportunity to attend school regularly as they are constantly moving with their families in search of work. It is precisely because of the difficult context that educational efforts with the youth can foster the drive for dialogue and peace.

AVSI has been present in Palestine since 1993, supporting not only schools but also centers for people with disabilities as well as orphanages. AVSI remains today an important point of reference for the neediest amongst society and is a concrete example of fraternity, offering assistance to anybody, without making religious distinctions. An important part of this ongoing support is the inclusion of thousands of children in the AVSI Distance Support Program.■

“Malnutrition and the Family”: Lessons Learned in Salvador de Bahia

AVSI participated in the seminar “Malnutrition and the Family: Experiences, Results, Problems and Challenges held on April 29, 2009, hosted by the Catholic University of Salvador, in the city of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, to discuss the results and lessons learned from the recently completed three-year project, “Family Support Center for at Risk Children and Adolescents”. The project was implemented through a partnership between AVSI and the Brazilian NGO Cooperation for Development and Morada Humana (CDM) from June of 2005 to April of 2009. Nearly 400 people participated in the conference, including volunteers and participants eager to share their experiences. Even still, seminar organizers had to turn participants away due to lack of space. The main themes highlighted throughout the course of the day were the person as a factor of change, malnutrition and the role of the family, and the importance of a multi-sector technical team to address malnutrition.■



AVSI Emphasizes Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Brazil

On June 9, 2009, AVSI hosted a seminar in Belo Horizonte, the capital of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, to present and discuss the results of the five-year program “Arvore da Vida”, or “Tree of Life”, which took place in the poor neighborhood of Betim. On this occasion, AVSI was able to emphasize in front of a large audience made up of representatives of the business community, social welfare agencies and politicians, the comparative advantage of partnerships among profit, non-profit and public institutions to further economic and social development.

“Arvore da Vida” is an innovative project which integrates topics such as youth training and employment, urban and

social upgrading, community services, and corporate social responsibility into one initiative.

The project is also innovative for putting together a variety of partners (international, national, and local organizations and businesses). A key partner has been FIAT Brazil, the subsidiary of the Italian automobile manufacturer which operates a plant in Betim, on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte. From 2004 to 2008, 5,200 youth participated in “Arvore da Vida” educational activities, 1,200 gained professional qualifications, and 70% found a stable job as a result. Thirty-five local institutions, 29 businesses and 160 educators were involved.

More than 300 participants representing many countries and organizations gathered, including the Mayor of Betim, the Secretaries for Social Welfare and Health of the State of Minas Gerais, Cledorvin Belin, president of FIAT Brazil, Marco Antonio Lage, the corporate communications director of FIAT, Michele Valensise, the Italian Ambassador to Brazil, and Alberto Piatti, Secretary General of AVSI Foundation.

More information on “Arvore da Vida” is available at the Avsi-USA website:

<http://www.avsi-usa.org/Arvore%20da%20Vida%202008.pdf>. ■

AVSI Presents Side Event at the G-8 Development Ministers’ Meeting

As the leaders of the most powerful nations of the world gathered in Rome to attend the G8 Development Ministers’ Meeting, AVSI was given a platform to address how it is possible for “the person to be at the center” of development programs and policies. On June 11, 2009, a side event entitled “The Human Being at the Core of Development Policies,” was included in the agenda of the meeting’s first day allowing for the presentation of lessons learned from a 5-year urban upgrading project implemented in the impoverished coastal area of Salvador, the capital city of the State of Bahia, Brazil.

The project commonly known as “Ribeira Azul” is an example of partnership among various actors: AVSI, Cities Alliance, the Brazilian national and local government agencies, the Italian Development Cooperation and the World Bank which built upon and reinforced the resources and social capital of individuals and people belonging to more 80 local organizations and institutions inside

the area, which have been the real protagonists of the project and the key factors of the sustainable outcomes as well.

Franco Frattini, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, opened the meeting



stating “development should be less concerned with procedure and more concerned with the person.” Frattini also emphasized the possibility for the lessons learnt at Ribeira Azul to serve as an example for other projects. As a matter of fact, the Ribeira Azul approach will be inspirational to a

tripartite (Brazil, Mozambique, Italy) endeavor, under the guidance of the Cities Alliance, for the urban upgrading of the poor and undeserved in Maputo, Mozambique.

The other speakers were José Antonio Marcondes, head of the delegation from Brazil to the G8, Alberto Piatti, the Secretary General of AVSI, William Cobbett, the manager of Cities Alliance, and Lareyne Almeida, the Ribeira Azul Program Officer.

To know more about the project see below the link to the booklet: **Alagados, The Story of Integrated Slum Upgrading in Salvador (Bahia), Brazil.**

<http://www.citiesalliance.org/publications/pubs/alagados.html>. ■

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Argentinean Farmers Helped to Find Place in the Livestock Market

AVSI, in conjunction with its local partner the Asociación Cultural para el Desarrollo Integral (ACDI), hosted a one-day seminar entitled "Competitive Livestock for All" in the region of Chaco, Argentina. The event, which took place April 15, 2009, was attended by roughly 50 cattle farmers and others who are involved in the agricultural sector in the same region. The seminar was part of a larger project sponsored by AVSI and ACDI which assists 300 small farmers to improve their farming practices in order to become more competitive. Various topics were discussed to help the farmers achieve a place in the Argentinean and export meat market, including technological innovations like livestock tracking and the important links between raising livestock and environmental issues such as biodiversity. See ACDI's website for more information visit: www.acdi.org.ar. ■



The winning photograph submitted by AVSI to the NUREP Photo Competition in Uganda

AVSI Wins Photography Competition

Brett Morton of AVSI Uganda recently won a photography contest sponsored by the Northern Ugandan Rehabilitation Program (NUREP). The theme of the contest was "New Lives through Peace and Development", taken from NUREP's overall goal of contributing to the rehabilitation, peace and development process in Northern Uganda by improving the conditions of the local populations and strengthening the capacity of local entities to respond to conflict situations. The participants in the contest were all implementing partners of NUREP.

A Letter from Puerto Rico: Gala for Gaza

On Friday, May 1st 2009, in a neoclassical building in Ponce, the southern capital of Puerto Rico, one hundred and fifty people were dining ten thousand miles away from Gaza yet somehow united with those suffering from the seemingly endless crisis in the Holy Land. The Puerto Rico evening featured a wonderful meal, music, an art auction, much laughter, but above all, the joy of being on the road towards our fulfillment. That night, we discovered that life is like a grand gala banquet, where the person is the protagonist. But why is it a protagonist? Because in following the Pope's indication, we found ourselves taking on some initiatives, desiring to invite all of Puerto Rico to a 'grand gala banquet for Gaza'. As the event's host and hostess, we realized that in us, our friends and our desire, hope had materialized. As the French writer Péguy said, "Without hope everything would be dead wood because hope is what pulls our faith". In this simple gesture we found out that to obey someone else's precise indication has never been so much fun and such a freeing experience."
Aura Montes and Daniel Aguilar, San Juan (Puerto Rico).

As a result of the effort of Aura, Daniel and their friends in Puerto Rico, almost \$10,000 was raised to support the immediate and long-term needs of people suffering in Gaza Strip. Thank You!