



**2019**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**BRIDGES TO GROWTH**



Americans  
for a Vibrant  
Palestinian  
Economy

# ABOUT AVPE

AVPE was founded in 2014 by Ed Thompson and Sam Bahour to build bridges between American and Palestinian businesses—as a way to support Palestine and challenge the too often negative political interactions. Today, the organization has transformed and expanded, with paid staff carrying out its important work in both countries. AVPE also cultivates a network of businesspeople in the U.S. and Palestine who offer voluntary and paid advice and expertise.

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Jabarin Musical Services crafts clarinets and oboes.



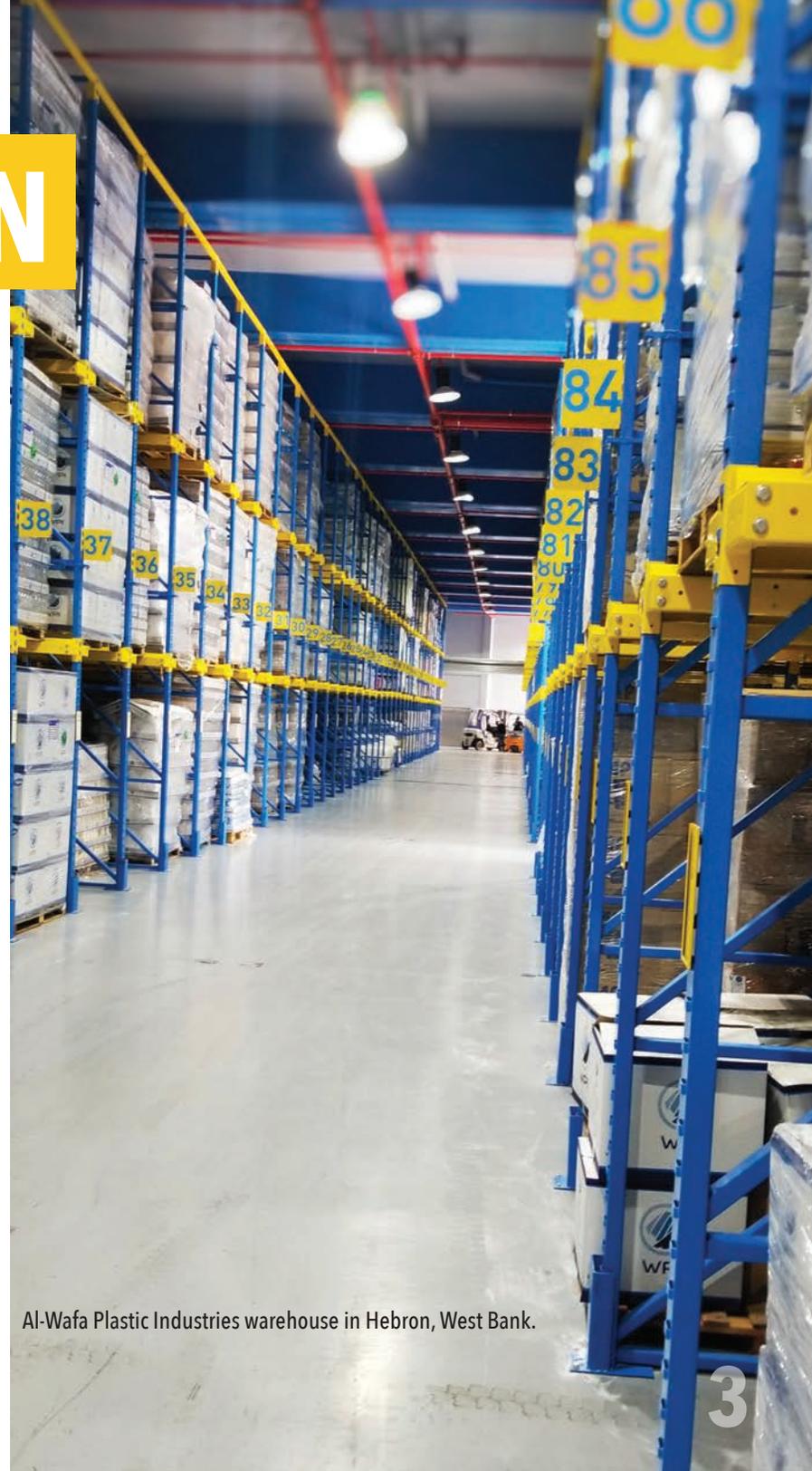
# OUR VISION

**At Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy (AVPE), we believe economic development cannot—and should not—wait for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.**

**We believe the effective use of business and economic levers can make life bearable for Palestinians and provide the experience needed to sustain dignified, empowering livelihoods—now and beyond.**

**Study after study has documented the debilitating constraints imposed on Palestinians that disrupt business and stifle the economy. Nevertheless, many Palestinian enterprises have found ways to survive and perform. This is where we come in.**

**AVPE's mission is to create social change and sow seeds of hope by building bridges between American and Palestinian enterprises, providing each with the knowledge, contacts, and context they need to collaborate and thrive. A free, independent and growing Palestinian economy will make the entire region more secure. Every productive business relationship plants another seed of hope so that Palestinians can constructively engage to build a future of freedom and economic independence. Americans and Palestinians working together creates hope and a glimpse of a future in which Palestinians can compete globally on a level playing field.**



Al-Wafa Plastic Industries warehouse in Hebron, West Bank.

# FROM THE FOUNDERS

The year 2019 marks the fifth year that Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy (AVPE) has been operational. We originally explored getting American investors to fund the startup and expansion of Palestinian businesses, but given U.S. securities regulations and the fact that investment funds are available in Palestine, we decided on a mission that was broader than a narrow movement of money from America to Palestine. By focusing on connecting Palestinian and American businesspeople, we believed we could achieve important outcomes in both the American and Palestinian business communities, in terms of business as well as education.

We believed (and still do) that building connections and relationships between American and Palestinian businesspeople would lead to more informed and constructive images of Palestinians by Americans. Many—if not most—Americans have stereotypes of Palestinians that ignore their resilience, steadfastness, creativity and business savvy, not to mention how they face obstacles that most businesspersons could only imagine as fiction. We also believed that American connections could help sustain Palestinian businesses today and lay the foundation for a vibrant economy when the Israeli occupation ends. We believed these relationships would give hope to Palestinian businesspeople and give them new possibilities for human and organizational growth.

Our mission statement has evolved to this:

**“AVPE builds bridges of hope and change between American and Palestinian businesspeople.”**

What we are trying to accomplish, however, always occurs in the context of the current political reality. In April 2014, Secretary of State Kerry’s peace efforts broke down and in the following years the situation on the ground and the daily lives of Palestinians deteriorated significantly. The relationship between the governments of the U.S. and Palestine has gone from merely contentious to entirely broken. When the Trump administration closed the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO’s) diplomatic mission in Washington D.C. and subsequently closed the U.S. Consulate in East Jerusalem, a formal relationship with the Palestinian political agency was severed. The Trump administration has withdrawn most U.S. funding directed to the U.N. agency responsible for Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), USAID and the Palestinian government. The headwinds that AVPE faces in building bridges between Palestinian and American businesspeople are formidable.

Because of these headwinds, AVPE has adapted. We are now focusing on generating more requests and offers from Americans to build bridges through knowledge transfer and goods and services from the U.S. to Palestine, in addition to fielding any requests that continue to emerge from the Palestinian business community.

We will be testing this revised approach in 2020 to determine whether the focus on initiatives from America can be used and appreciated by Palestinian businesspeople to achieve program outcomes that meet the needs of both American and Palestinian businesspeople.

Palestinians have a centuries-long tradition of mercantile activity in an important geographical intersection of international trade. This gives us hope that we can continue to tap into this Palestinian strength to create bridges that expand capabilities for Palestinian businesspeople and break down stereotypes in Americans. At the end of 2020, we will come to the end of our term limits as board members. Our Executive Director, Layla Kaiksow, is carrying forward the primary operational responsibilities for AVPE with support, as needed, from contracted Palestinian consultants, selected for their related expertise. We both will not be far from AVPE—we remain committed to its mission and the amazing communities of support built over this short history of the organization.

We deeply appreciate the time, talent and other treasures that have been offered by volunteers, donors and supporters. We can only achieve beneficial outcomes when our network responds positively to our requests, and we are confident that you will continue to step up when you see an opportunity to help.

Kind thanks for making bridge building possible,

Sam Bahour  
Co-founder & Board Chair

*Sam Bahour*

Ed Thompson  
Co-founder & President

*Edward E Thompson*



A West Bank stone quarry.

REQUESTS FROM PALESTINE

REQUESTS FROM THE U.S.

- Beit Jala Pharmaceutical Company links up with AVPE-vetted consulting firm to develop U.S. market entry strategy
- AVPE presented seven prospective business advisors to Transcend with the aim of helping it expand its IT/software relationship with a high-profile U.S. client
- Jabarin Musical Services, which crafts clarinets and oboes, works with an AVPE-suggested business advisor to help it market its products in the U.S. at trade shows
- Palestinian Plastics Industries Union (PPIU) is now being advised by an Arabic-speaking business advisor found through the AVPE network
- Reach, a call center, asked AVPE to research and vet possible sales representatives to expand its U.S. customer base
- The Union of Stone and Marble (USM) is seeking a business advisor, via AVPE, to educate its members about the U.S. market and trade shows
- The Bethlehem Fair Trade Association has asked AVPE to find a U.S.-based business advisor to market its new eco-tourism program there

- Washington D.C.-based Al-Quds Festival and Palestine Trade Show has solicited participation from Palestinian enterprises through AVPE's network

- mebl, a New York-based reclaimed/sustainable furniture importer has twice asked AVPE to connect it with Palestinian furniture makers. Resign's products are on their way to Manhattan showrooms and mebl is looking for another partner

- Aceituna Grill has used AVPE to find and taste-test a possible supplier of tahini sauce for its chain of restaurants

- CrossRealms has asked AVPE to help recruit qualified candidates for its high-level cyber security training program, from which it will select interns and new hires

## PPIU & USM PARTNERSHIPS CREATED

# 11

BUSINESS ADVISORS RECRUITED

# + 121%

FACEBOOK FOLLOWS

# + 127%

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

# 2019 ACHIEVEMENTS

# AVPE'S WORK MODEL

AVPE can help with requests for information, advice, coaching, mentoring, training and other ways that solve problems, transfer knowledge, build organizational capabilities and broaden perspectives.

## SERVICES FOR PALESTINIANS

### Advice on:

- entering American markets and other markets outside of Palestine and Israel;
- trade show attendance and participation;
- leadership, operations, or other skills or problems that prevent businesses from achieving their potential.

**Sample delivery** to American consumers and distribution channels.

## SERVICES FOR AMERICANS

**Find Palestinian products or services** that can be used by businesspeople in the U.S.

**Locate Palestinians with special technical skills** for Americans and U.S. businesses seeking service development partners outside the U.S., and entry points to Middle East and North Africa markets.

Please send us any special requests—we are glad to consider them!

# THE AVPE TEAM



**Layla Kaiksov, Executive Director & American Operations**

Based in Houston, Texas, Kaiksov has extensive experience working in fair trade and holds a Masters degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in International Economic Development.



**Reema AbuShaheen, Palestine Operations Officer**

Reema AbuShaheen is a Business Development Manager and holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Technology and a Masters in Strategic Planning and Fundraising.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Sam Bahour** is a Palestinian-American business development consultant based in Al-Bireh-Ramallah, Palestine. His firm, Applied Information Management (AIM), specializes in start-ups.



**Ed Thompson** retired in 2007 after nearly four decades as a consultant and corporate staff of Midwest businesses to invest his discretionary time in advocating for a just peace in that land between the river and the sea.



**Sana'a Hussien** is an attorney in Chicago, representing clients in corporate development, business and commercial real estate transactions, international business development, and estate planning.



**Dima Abushaaban** is a corporate strategy professional with a focus on U.S. healthcare, based in Chicago. She has expertise in management consulting and has worked across the Middle East.



**Geoffrey Lewis** is a lawyer practicing in New York and Massachusetts, focusing on trial work and all aspects of family law. He is International Co-Chair of the Abraham Initiatives and serves on the board of Americans for Peace Now.



**Nisreen Musleh**, founder and managing director of RITAJ Managerial Solutions in Ramallah, Palestine, led her firm from start-up to market leadership in professional training management and language services.



**Arnold R. Cowan, Ph.D.**, is the Wells Fargo Professor of Finance at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. He is the founder and CEO of Cowan Research, producer of Eventus, an analytical software package for academic research.

# AVPE ON THE GROUND

AVPE focused on increasing visibility in 2019 in order to increase our spheres of influence both in Palestine and the U.S.

## BOARD MEETS IN RAMALLAH

In March, most of the board gathered for two days in Ramallah. The group also met with several key figures, gathering information and building relationships. Dr. Nabeel Kassis, Director General of Palestinian Economic Policy Research, and Ms. Doa' Wadi, Executive Director of the Businesswomen Forum-Palestine, provided expert insight into conditions on the ground.

Members of the AVPE Board of Directors meet in Ramallah, March 2019.

The Board of Directors also signed a partnership agreement with the Palestinian Plastics Industries Union and met with several PPIU member companies. Angele Bannoura, Managing Director of AVPE partner, the Beit Jala Pharmaceutical Company, also met with the board. Finally, AVPE hosted an event in Ramallah with the Palestinian American Chamber of Commerce and ten attendee companies to discuss the opportunities available through AVPE.



## AVPE REACHES OUT

- Ed Thompson presented AVPE's work at the 2nd Annual Ramallah Business Professional Network conference in Denver, Colorado.
- Layla Kaiksow met with Freddy Mussa, a Ramallah Business Professional Network member, in San Francisco to discuss current AVPE work and sharing its mission with the Bay Area Arab American community.
- Ed Thompson met with the former Ramallah Club national president, in Detroit, to discuss sharing AVPE's mission with the Ramallah Club.
- Sam Bahour meets regularly with groups traveling to Palestine, focusing on the economic realities of life under military occupation and sharing the ways that AVPE is making progress despite huge obstacles. These groups are religious, political and academic, usually from the U.S. but also beyond.

“ I was first introduced to AVPE through Ed Thompson back in 2016 and—although I was resistant at first—over time and many discussions I started to understand the value that AVPE brings to bridge the divide between qualified resources in Palestine and CrossRealms, Inc., a U.S. based company. We are currently working with AVPE on a very exciting program to train fresh Palestinians graduates on cyber security with a 24-month paid internship program allowing them to work on projects side-by-side with seasoned professionals in the field. This program is conducted completely virtually, traversing roadblocks and geographical restrictions and making it ideal for those disadvantaged by the occupation.”



—Usama Houliila, CEO, CrossRealms, Inc.

# PARTNERSHIPS

AVPE signed an agreement with the **Palestinian Plastic Industries Union**, a consortium of companies that works to promote the Palestinian plastics industry abroad. The two groups agreed to share information on investment opportunities and membership databases, cooperate on business and trade delegations, and promote each other's activities and goals.

AVPE is also working with the **Union of Stone and Marble Industry** in Palestine via a signed agreement to share information and networking information, which includes Palestinian producers, and also to promote each other's interests and events.



Yogurt containers stacked at Al-Wafa Plastic Industries.



## PALESTINE'S ECONOMY

### Projected 2020 GDP

**16.1 - 13.6 billion\***

\*COVID-19 impact

### Unemployment

**24% in Palestine**

**43% in Gaza**

**14% in West Bank**

- Q4 2019

### Poverty

**24% below \$5.50**

46% in Gaza, 9% in West Bank, 2016/17

### Economic Dependence on Israel

**80% of exports**

**58% of imports**

### Total Banking Deposits

**US\$12.2 billion**

165% up since 2007

### Banks

**8 Palestinian banks**

**5 Jordanian banks**

**1 Egyptian bank**

### IT & Telecommunications Sector

**400 companies, 8,000 workers**

**6% GDP**

Government plans to boost GDP share to 12% by increasing and diversifying exports.

### Tourism

**450,000 tourists**

**US\$ 469 million**

- in 2019

Sources: Palestinian IT Association, World Bank, Palestine This Week May 2020

## WHERE WE WORK

AVPE is incorporated in Illinois, with board members and staff located in Chicago, Detroit, Ames (Iowa), Houston, and Boston. It has supported businesses in Chicago, New York City and Austin (Texas), and has a network of contacts all over the United States. At the same time, it has board members and staff in the West Bank town of Ramallah and several agreements with business-oriented organizations that span Palestine.



## THE OCCUPIED STATE OF PALESTINE

The Palestinian town of Ramallah sits less than 30 miles from the coast and Tel Aviv. But the barrier that Israel started to build in 2002—a series of high cement walls, guard towers, monitored fences, gates and checkpoints—blocks access to ports and Israeli markets. A permit system requires Palestinians who seek to travel—sometimes only within the West Bank—to obtain permission from Israel's military government. The Gaza Strip has been under blockade since 2006, with Israel's military heavily restricting goods and people that enter and leave the small, fenced territory. A crossing to Egypt is only accessible sometimes and to some people. The West Bank is home to 2.8 million Palestinians. Some 600,000 Jewish Israelis live there in settlements that are illegal under international law. Gaza's 1.9 million Palestinians have seen three military aggressions by Israel in the past decade.



Source: UN OCHA

# DONORS

Ahmed Abugharbia

Dima Abushaaban

Karen Abuzayd

Fredric Andes

Anonymous (2)

Abla Aranki

Albert & Carol Asfour

Janan Asfour

Marwan Balaa

Elizabeth Berger, MD

Jennifer Bing

Daniel Casey

Joyce Cassel

Linda Cohen

Green Olive Collective

John Copenhaver

Arnold Cowan

Caroline Cracraft

Edward Edens

Manal Fakhoury

Dirk Ficca

Ann Franklin

Bob & Sheila Friedland

David Ginsburg

Nadia Hijab

Michael Hirschhorn

Nadim H. Homsy

Sana'a Hussien

Zaina Ileiwat

Erik Bavngaard Jensen

Rosalind Joffe

Farah Kaiksow

Layla Kaiksow

Anna Kaminski

Marilyn Katz

Alice Kisch

Rebecca Krantz

Ursula Krummel

Geoffrey Lewis

John Lindner

Robert Lubotsky

Jeffrey Mack

Richard Makdisi

Joelee Margolis

Bozena Nowicka & John  
McLees

Judd Miner

Robert Moon

Elizabeth Moumene

Nancy Muse

Nasser Nabhan

Ruth Nelson

Germana Nijim

Leslie Nobles

Ariadne Papagapitos

Lynn Pollack

E. Price

James Ray

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Grace Said

Kais Salhut

Pam Sall

John Saphir

Fred Schlomka

Dieter Schulte

Ann Selph

Rachel Sheinin

Saffiya Shillo

Nina Shoman-Dajani

Newland Smith

Leona Strassberg Steiner

Zuhair Suidan

Scott Thams

Edward Thompson

Carla Thompson Powell

Joseph Totaro

Terry Weber

Mary Ann & Mike Weston

Mitchell Yates

Mark Zivin

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

## ITEMS

2019

Carryforward liabilities & fund balances  
as of January 1, 2019

37,643

## INCOME

Donations and other income

86,673

Donations for fiscal sponsorship

159,881

Transfer to fiscal sponsorship less fee

151,887

**Total Income**

**86,673**

## EXPENSE

Administrative Expense

11,546

Program Expense

47,734

Fundraising Expense

1,200

**Total Expense**

**60,480**

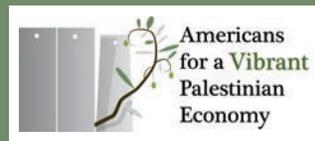
**TOTAL ASSETS as of December 31, 2019**

**63,836**



**AT AVPE, WE BELIEVE AMERICANS AND PALESTINIANS SHOULD BE PARTNERS FOR HOPE THAT CREATE BRIDGES FOR CHANGE.**

Support us as we help bring independence and dignity to the Palestinian job market, providing resources to businesses of all sizes and linking them with the possibilities and resources of the U.S. economy.



**Get involved with AVPE!**

**NETWORK | REQUEST SUPPORT | DONATE**

**VISIT [WWW.A4VPE.ORG](http://WWW.A4VPE.ORG)**



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[twitter.com/a4vpe](https://twitter.com/a4vpe)



[linkedin.com/company/americans-4-a-vibrant-palestinian-economy/](https://linkedin.com/company/americans-4-a-vibrant-palestinian-economy/)



**YouTube**

<https://youtu.be/OLbGEOTcNc>

AVPE is a U.S.A. 501(c)(3) Illinois nonprofit organization that delivers a range of services to promote engagement and relationships between American and Palestinian businesspeople. These services include using AVPE networks in the U.S. to find individuals who have the experience and expertise to fulfill requests from Palestinian businesspeople. This may involve requests for information, advice, coaching, mentoring, training and other ways that solve problems, transfer knowledge, build organizational capabilities and broaden perspectives. These connections primarily will happen through virtual meetings but may also involve face-to-face meetings in Palestine or the U.S. We also identify American businesspeople that are willing to share knowledge and expertise with Palestinian businesspeople, and use their products and services.