

The Palestinian Trade Fair:

Jerusalem souvenirs come to London

London - Islamic Tourism

London celebrated last month the craft and traditional skills of Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities. The Palestinian Trade Fair, held from November 30th to 5th December brought the souvenirs of Jerusalem to the heart of Europe together with the local skills of wood carving, shell work, olive oil, dress making, embroidery, carpet weaving, pottery and other crafts.



The Association of Craft and Souvenirs in East Jerusalem" has brought to London samples of these crafts from 450 shops in the Old City and East Jerusalem, Abdul-Raouf Abu Assab, the president of the Association told Islamic Tourism. The association was set up in 1954 and today represents 450 shops.

The Fair, which was held at the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce, was launched by Afif Safieh, the Palestinian Ambassador to Britain and Sir Roger Tomkeys, Chairman of the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce. Safieh drew attention to the dire state of the Palestinian economy and was hopeful the fair would play a part in reviving it. Sir Roger highlighted the plight of the Palestinians and produced figures to show that 60 % of the people of Gaza live



below the poverty line. Amir Al-Dajani, from the Palestinian Development Programme, emphasised the importance of tourism to the economic life of the Palestinians. Hanna Sinyorah mentioned that 200 of the 450 shops in Jerusalem have been closed due to the drop in the number of tourists to Jerusalem and the obstacles which have been imposed by the occupation. The fair was opened by the mayor of London Ken Livingstone and attended by a number of diplomats and supporters of the Palestinian cause. The products were displayed in three rooms, one for wood and shell work, embroideries and pottery. Jerusalem merchants Mr. Alfred Raad and Mr. Nazik Ghaith explained that souvenirs were made of olive tree wood with three main themes: religious (Christian themes related to the story of Jesus and the Virgin Mary), local life and camels from the desert. There were also shells made into pictures of Jerusalem and other subjects. The crosses and the Christian themes seem to sell well in Italy while



the embroideries and olive oil sell well in Britain. The embroideries come from Ramallah, north Palestine, Naples and its villages and the south, Bet Laham and Hebron. Ghassan Abden, Deputy Head of the Association of Crafts in Jerusalem told us that he is more than happy with the number and quality of the visitors. Munther Barakat said that these products show that the Palestinian people are firmly entrenched on their land - just like their olive trees. Mohammad Al-Rajabi from East Jerusalem said that the state of the pottery business and other crafts is very bad because of the political situation. His shop, next to Al-Aqsa Mosque, had to change its focus from catering to foreign tourists to local worshippers at the mosque and concentrate on Islamic themes. In addition to the pottery, glass work from Hebron and olive oil are on display. The fair, was an excellent way of acquainting the public with the Palestinian people, their problems, hopes and aspirations for their independent state. ■