From Saif Al-Shaer, Evangelical Lutheran School – Beit Sahour

For me as a child living in Palestine under Israeli occupation, life is a big challenge. Everything here is mixed with politics. As I have to witness a lot of brutal acts whether in reality or in media, I have no option but to play an adult's role. So often, the Israeli checkpoints prevent us from playing, socializing, or even doing certain activities of daily life which children in many countries take for granted. I always ask my parents to travel abroad or even go for a picnic in a nearby city, and they say it is better to do something at home rather than spend your time at a check point. These checkpoints spoil our lives.…

Ideally, apart from my expectations and my dreams, the factors that should shape my life are: family, friends, school, and neighborhood. Unfortunately, the political factor and the military Israeli occupation are also shaping my life. Whatever we wish or plan here may collapse suddenly due to a curfew or a sudden military order. We are living in an unstable environment, and so we feel that we are very vulnerable. Sudden shocks, fear, uncertainty, play a strong role in our life. But, my aspiration, my will, and the support of my family help me to have control over other factors.

I always have mixed feelings: "For whom am I living?" Am I living for myself as Saif, or as a Palestinian or as a human being? I wish I could make the right balance between the three. But occupation brutal measures make my Palestinian self always stronger than the other two. Unfortunately I always find a conflict between my real life and the life I dream of. Unlike other children from other countries, this is the big challenge I face and that is why I have always fears. As a child, in Palestine I am bearing heavy responsibilities upon my shoulders. The suffering here enriches my experience. Unlike other children, my ambition is to realize a decent life to live in dignity and freedom. As Nelson Mandela has said: "To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity." …In my view, realizing the future we want for all requires the following measures. First of all, our country must be free and occupation must come to an end. The life of suffer, insecurity, and humiliation must end. Then we can work on encouraging the language of tolerance and change the culture of hatred. I believe that there is a huge gap of misunderstanding, lack of trust, and fear. This must change. Our thoughts and traditional positions must change towards peaceful thinking.