



CHILDREN IN GAZA DRAW TO REMEMBER



Qasr Al-Basha
after it was bombed

CHILDREN sheltering in Rafah, southern Gaza, have created stunning pictures of historical buildings destroyed in the war between Israel and Gaza.

The war began on 7 October last year, when Hamas, the group that controls Gaza, invaded neighbouring Israel, killed some 1,200 people and took 252 back to Gaza as

hostages. Since then, Israel has bombarded Gaza and sent its army in to hunt down Hamas leaders and to rescue the hostages.

With all schools in Gaza closed, for many children taking part in art sessions, it is the first opportunity they have had to pick up a pencil or crayon and come together with

other children since the outbreak of the conflict there.

The sessions have been funded by UK charity Christian Aid and run by Palestinian partner, Culture and Free Thought Association.

Here are some photos of children with their art, and what the pictures mean to them:



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Amal*, 11, beams as she displays her artwork of Qasr Al-Basha during a class held in a refugee shelter in Al-Mawasi, northern Rafah. Many families have had to move multiple times due to the conflict and are living in makeshift camps.



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Also known as Pasha's Palace, 13th century Qasr Al-Basha in Gaza City previously housed a museum of antiquity and Al-Zahraa Secondary School for Girls before being destroyed during this war.



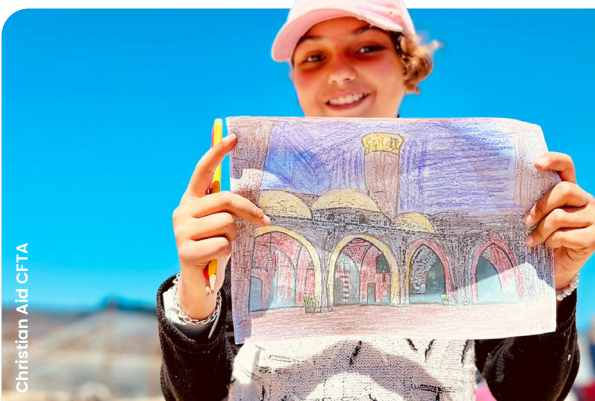
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"Children in Gaza are undergoing horrors no child should ever experience," says Julie Mehigan, Christian Aid's Programme Manager for Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The charity is urging the next UK government to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and review its arms export licences (used for sending weapons abroad).



Christian Aid CFTA

Weekly creative workshops give youngsters the opportunity to put the conflict to the back of their minds and just be children again, like ten-year-old Rasem* in the centre of the image and Zahra*, aged 12, to his left.



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Ibtisama*, who is 13, stands holding her vibrant picture of a red and yellow Omari Mosque under a brilliant blue sky. The oldest mosque in Gaza, based in Daraj, Gaza City, is also known as the Great Mosque of Gaza. It lies in ruins now.



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Amal* displays another of her pictures – this one is of Great Omari Mosque. UNESCO has expressed "deep concern" about the impact of the ongoing conflict on cultural heritage.

Thirteen-year-old Safa'a* proudly poses with her colouring of Qasr Al-Basha. "The children's artwork consolidates (strengthens) the cultural identity of Gaza and keeps it – and their hopes – alive," says William Bell, Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy.



Christian Aid CFTA



Christian Aid CFTA

Buthaina Al-Faqawi, a community mobiliser for Culture and Free Thought Association, describes the change she witnesses in the children when they join the sessions: "The first look is despair and misery. The second look is hope. The third look is love of life and childhood. Please... we deserve life, we deserve better."