

June 26, 2014

# THEWORLDPOST

A PARTNERSHIP OF THE HUFFINGTON POST AND BERGGRUEN INSTITUTE ON GOVERNANCE

Edition: U.S. ▼

Search The Huffington Post

f Like 370k t Follow +1

FRONT PAGE POLITICS BUSINESS MEDIA GREEN TECH ARTS TRAVEL WOMEN RELIGION HUFFPOST LIVE ALL SECTIONS



**David Weiss** President and CEO of CHF International

## The Future President of Palestine

Despite so many news stories focusing on the violence and turmoil that have affected the Middle East in the last few years, nothing could have been further from my mind during my last trip to the West Bank. While there I met remarkable people who are working tirelessly to help improve the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians. From government officials to nonprofit organizations and civil society in general, there are many people working toward a better future in the region. And to my surprise, even people who may seem too young to understand the issues affecting their country today are doing their part and working toward a more peaceful and prosperous future for the Palestinian people.

One of the most inspiring people I met was Basha'er Othman, a 15-year-old girl from Illar, a small town of just over 6,000 people. Basha'er is the "shadow" mayor of her town and one day, she told me, she hopes to be the president of a future state of Palestine. I have no doubt that her drive and poise will take her a long way. But for now, she is learning the ropes by being the democratically elected "shadow" mayor and working with the local council members of her town. In her position, she is supervised by the mayor and the deputy mayor and is expected to engage other youth members to shadow the municipality's council members.

*PHOTO: Basha'er meeting with Illar Municipality Council members.*



Basha'er became involved in local government through the [Youth Shadow Local Council \(YSLC\)](#) -- an initiative implemented by [CHF International](#) as part of the [USAID-funded Local Democratic Reform program\(LDR\)](#). CHF helped form Youth Shadow Local Councils across the West Bank to engage youth and teach them about local governance and democracy. The program targets 12 communities which are administered by democratically elected municipal and local councils: [Beit Sahour](#), [Jericho](#), [Al-Tayba](#), [Abu Dis](#), [Salfeet](#), [Anabta](#), [Illar](#), [Qalqilya](#), [Ar Ram](#), [Idhna](#), [Halhoul](#), [Beit Fajjar](#). The activities of the YSLCs will be expanded under the current Local Government and Infrastructure program also funded by [USAID](#) and implemented by CHF International. We hope further to implement the YSLC initiative in other countries using what has been already developed in the West Bank as a model.

Basha'er says that her mission is to empower her fellow youth to become part of the local government's participatory democratic decision-making process on the local and national levels. Despite her ambitious dreams, Basha'er was brought up in a marginalized community. Her well-being, however, was of the utmost importance to her parents, who in spite of the hardships had one thing in mind: guide their young daughter in the right direction. And it has certainly paid off. Basha'er is driven, polite and charming, and is slowly changing the way many Palestinians see women and youth in local politics.

Since late January 2011, she has been heading the Youth Shadow Local Council (YSLC) in Illar and has been actively involved in empowering youth by being engaged in her community. And while the YSLC seeks to prove the potential of youth at the local level, Basha'er has gone a lot further, making her mark regionally and nationally. Within a year of her term presiding over the YSLC, Basha'er expanded their reach by coordinating activities with regional and national stakeholders. She presented Illar's YSLC achievements to the Minister of Local Government and Minister of National Economy at the Youth Summit, held in 2011. She also led efforts of a number of YSLCs in joint activities and campaigns and coordinated with Al-Najah University in Nablus and the American University in Jenin.

At the moment, the young shadow mayor is completely focused on what she needs to learn and what the people around her should learn as well. Basha'er hopes that by participating in the YSLC, she will be able to fulfill her dream. And I am confident that with the support and guidance she needs, she will get there. It is inspiring people like Basha'er that fill me with hope that in the future we will in fact be able to see better days not only for the Palestinian people, but for the whole Middle East.