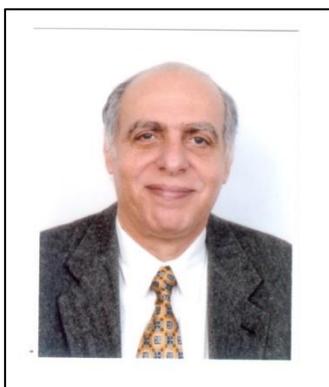


**International Conference on Religious Tourism:  
*Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities***

**Bethlehem, State of Palestine, 15-16 June 2015**

**Session 2: Religious heritage and tourism routes – promoting cross border cooperation**

**Mr. Hani Abu Dayeh, President, Net Tours, Palestine**



**Bio:**

Hani Abu Dayeh is the President and General Manager of NET TOURS based in Rome with offices in Jerusalem, Amman, Istanbul and Athens. He initiated the establishment of Palestinian Development Fund (PDF) and he has been part of the Board of Trustees of the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation Hospital since 2000. He is also on the Board of Directors for the Bethlehem Development Initiative.

Abu Dayyeh graduated with an MA in International Affairs and Economics from the School of Advanced International Studies, John's Hopkins University. In 1989 and 1991, he was the President of the Board for the Union of Arab Tourist Transport as well as for the Higher Council of the Arab Tourist Industry (HCATI) from 1989 to 1993. He also represented Palestine at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers Meetings in Hyeres in 1992 and 1993.

He has participated as a speaker at the International Institute of Peace Through Tourism (IIPT), the Economic Conference (Amman, Jordan) and the opening of the Berlin Christmas Market, among others.

Abstract: Spirituality and Religious tourism in Palestine – The Heart of the Holy Land

The Lord had said to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land. He walked with God. He was truly the first recorded Pilgrim of the three monotheistic faiths. God asked him to go to the Holy Land – Al Bilad al Muqadaseh.

That recorded historical event was the beginning of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The three central figures of these three monotheistic religions were pilgrims themselves - Moses when he left Egypt and headed to the Promised Land, Jesus himself used to travel from his home in the Galilee to Jerusalem on pilgrimage, and Mohammad's mystical experience with the night Journey to Jerusalem - Beit Al Makdes - was a pilgrimage.

With these movements of these 4 central figures in our three monotheistic faiths, a sacred geography was established that celebrates events that gave deep meaning to the lives of millions of people and have transformed world history in the process. Within this sacred geography several sacred routes were established over the millenniums that pilgrims have been following through the ages. This sacred geography covers a very wide region and encompasses several modern nation states.

Palestine that defines itself as the Heart of the Holy Land and home of Beit Al-Makdes is an essential part of this tourism product and any delineation of a religious tourism route that we as a Palestinian Tourism industry try to promote is inherently a regional product.

The challenge for us as a Palestinian Tourism industry with a proven centrality within this religious tourism is to how to maximize our socio-economic returns and a greater employment generation for our people.

We will look at the efforts of Bethlehem University in partnerships with the concerned governmental, private sector and religious bodies in trying not only to provide the right hospitality training for the future cadre of Palestinian workers within this promising industry, but also how to contribute to the expansion of the Palestinian tourism products and offers while maintaining the religious and cultural nature and values of our unique and sacred tourism product.