

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

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**Session 4: Inclusive socio-economic development of local communities –
promoting partnerships that work**

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Bio:

Fida Touma is currently the director of the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program (OCJRP) at the Welfare Association. Until November 2014, she was the co-director of Riwaq – Center for Architectural Conservation. She held many posts at Riwaq prior to being the director and worked on various projects. Her main competencies are in architectural conservation, regeneration of historic centers, network building, project planning and monitoring. Ms. Touma worked as part of a team at Riwaq to develop tourism trails that linked various villages in the West Bank and has represented the organization in NEPTO (the network of Palestinian experiential tourism organizations).

She is trained as an architect/restorer (Birzeit University) and has attained a Masters in Public Policy and Administration from UMASS- Amherst in 2007.

Abstract:

Palestine is a country with a strong non-governmental sector. Non-governmental, nonprofit organizations have historically played a role in

providing social services for the people during occupation, and after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority these have assumed many roles as partners in development, providers of humanitarian aid, human rights champions etc. The tourism sector is not different than the rest. While Palestine was always a pilgrimage destination for religious tourism, that scene was dominated by the main monumental attractions, well established tour operators and stakeholders. Experimental and local tourism that touched people's lives directly was an open ground for grassroots enthusiasts who saw an opportunity to showcase the other side of Palestine and to channel tourism profits to local communities.

Through the development of trails, the rehabilitation of cultural heritage and the training of local communities, nonprofits have been able to make use of local services and knowledge to provide local communities with new income from tourism and to have been able to provide both local and international tourists with a new image of Palestine. Either individually or through networks, nonprofits have been able to make advantage of new and modern technological options to direct tourism towards the open terrain of landscape, villages, and shrines thus not only providing a more cost effective option for tourists but also giving families (especially women) an opportunity to celebrate their knowledge and earn an income.