



Green City Builds Prosperity for Palestine

A new sustainable development, 'Rawabi is designed to serve a generation of Palestinians coming of age and seeking welcoming surroundings to build families, careers and lives'

by Sarah Wilkinson

Just five miles north of Ramallah in the West Bank, and Rawabi, a new state-of-the-art eco city for Palestinian families, is rising. When complete, in about three years' time, it will provide opportunities for affordable home ownership, jobs, education and leisure, as well as being an attractive, sustainable environment in which to live, work and grow.

The project, dubbed the most adventurous in modern Palestinian history, is the realisation of a dream steered into reality by entrepreneur, Bashar Masri. Born and raised in the West Bank, the 49-year-old father of two gained international recognition building thousands of affordable homes in Morocco, Jordan and Egypt. Named a 'Global Leader of Tomorrow' by the World Economic Forum, Bashar's primary aim was to one day invest in his homeland and lead the country forward through economic development.

After many years of collaboration and planning, his vision is finally coming to life on land purchased in 'Area A' – a district belonging absolutely to Palestine.

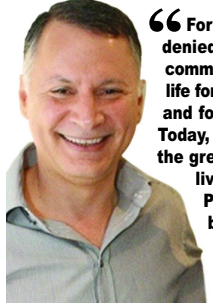


So, this is the first Palestinian city to be built in accordance with a masterplan – a comprehensive document, drawn up from careful consultation with the local community, architectural engineers and stakeholders. It covers eco-issues, such as wastewater treatment, recycling, water conservation and renewable energy. It explores how precincts, street layouts, pedestrian routes and community spaces will best suit residents' needs and integrate with the surrounding landscape.

Once abundant with fruit orchards and flowering trees – olive, oak, citrus and nut – the natural beauty of the country has been damaged by war, development, neglect and climate change. To combat this, through its 'GROW for a Greener Palestine', the masterplan incorporates the planting of around 25,000 trees and the preservation, through relocation, of hundreds of existing olive trees.

Thousands of saplings have already been donated by the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture and from businesses, organisations and individuals. Bayti have donated all the planting tools, fertiliser, irrigation systems and companion shrubs, while trees are being carefully selected by a local arborist to ensure suitability and hardiness. GROW is offering the chance for both Palestinians and people worldwide to purchase a tree, or indeed a woodland, and have it planted on-site, on behalf of themselves or someone else.

Meanwhile, Bashar hopes the development will prepare for the eventual end of Israeli occupation and encourage crucial investment in a region often overlooked. "It's about building a nation," he says. "Rawabi is a city for all Palestinians,



“For many years we have been denied the right to build new communities, to create quality of life for ourselves, for our children and for our children's children. Today, we stand facing one of the greatest opportunities of our lives — the chance to build Palestine as we wish it to be built ... the Palestine of our long denied dreams”

**Bashar Masri, managing director
Bayti Real Estate Investment Company**

Significantly, this means that Rawabi can be heralded as an independent Palestinian initiative, as well as a model for future plot developments.

On-site construction is in the hands of property management company, Bayti, who are joint-owned by Mr Masri's firm, Massar International, and government-backed Middle Eastern investors, Qatari Diar – financiers of the Shard at London Bridge, soon to be the tallest and most spectacular building in the UK.

Rawabi, which is the Arabic word for hills – and on a clear day you can see as far as the Mediterranean – is promising an urban serenity previously unknown in this part of the world. Comprising 23 districts, the complex will provide around 5,000 affordable homes, with nine practical styles to choose from. Eventually, it will accommodate 40,000 residents and alleviate a housing shortage, which has plagued the West Bank for some time.

The city will encompass an investor-friendly commercial centre with banks,

shops, mosques, health clinics, offices, schools, libraries, a hospital, hotel and cinema. It will also contain lush, green, scented spaces, wooded parks, community playgrounds, inter-connected walking

trails lined with trees, bicycle paths and a viable public transport network.

Each home will feature semi-private gardens, so that residents can meet and forge relationships, in keeping with the Palestinian concept of the *hara*, meaning neighbourhood, where everyone knows each other. In addition, a multi-purpose cultural centre will offer Rawabians a place to gather and engage, while public sector facilities and neighbourhood associations will encourage self-governance and community management.

One of Palestine's greatest assets is its well-educated but under-employed professional population. The region boasts 11 universities, producing highly qualified graduates, who at present, are a vastly untapped resource. Planned as a hub of business activity, the new city will target this very sector, resulting in a new wave of rewarding employment as never before seen in the country. The project is already a huge deal for the region's economy, creating many thousands of jobs in the construction process alone.

Although individual home ownership among Palestinians is still unusual, young

families have been quick to recognise the potential and register an interest. "There really is a sad lack of accommodation for Palestinians," project engineer Andy Hewitt told *Building* magazine. "It's an eye-opener to see what conditions even middle-class Palestinians live in." Previously, the absence of affordable mortgage loans in the country, coupled with extremely high property prices and



the obvious risks, made it difficult for the average family to purchase a home. But now, accessible long-term finance programmes, set up specifically to cater for the new development, will change all this and make it possible for Palestinians to buy into a better life.

The Rawabi team believe that another contributor to the project's success is its sympathetic, protective approach to the environment. "Palestine's cities and the people's collective future can never be truly guaranteed without being watchful of the air we breathe, the land on which we tread and the natural surroundings we hold so dear," they say.

from all walks of life, who aspire to own an affordable home within a healthy and welcoming environment. I encourage all Palestinians to embrace the dream of Rawabi – to become a part of its fabric and its future."

Contact: Bayti Real Estate Investment Company, PO Box 2132, Ramallah, Palestine. Tel: +970 2 241 5444
Website: www.rawabi.ps

Rawabi is being developed on fertile and historic hillsides, overlooking spectacular views and breathtaking tranquillity
All photos and graphics: © Rawabi

