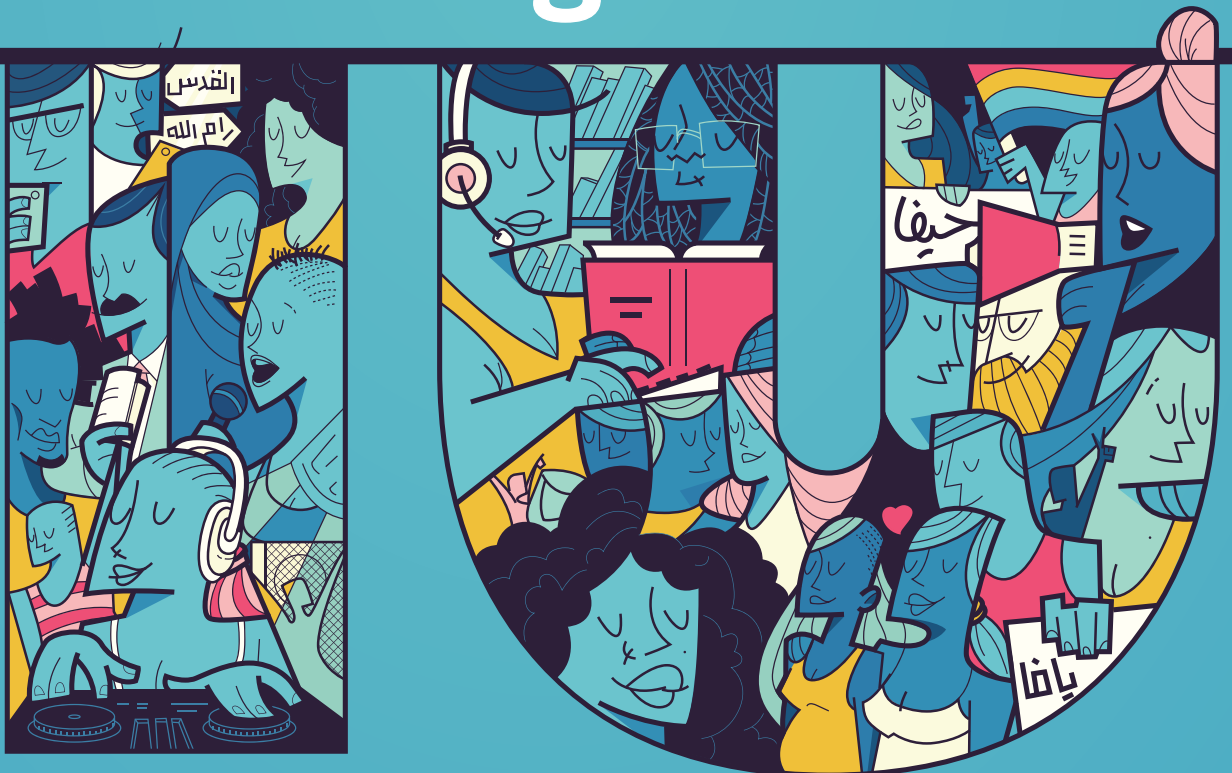
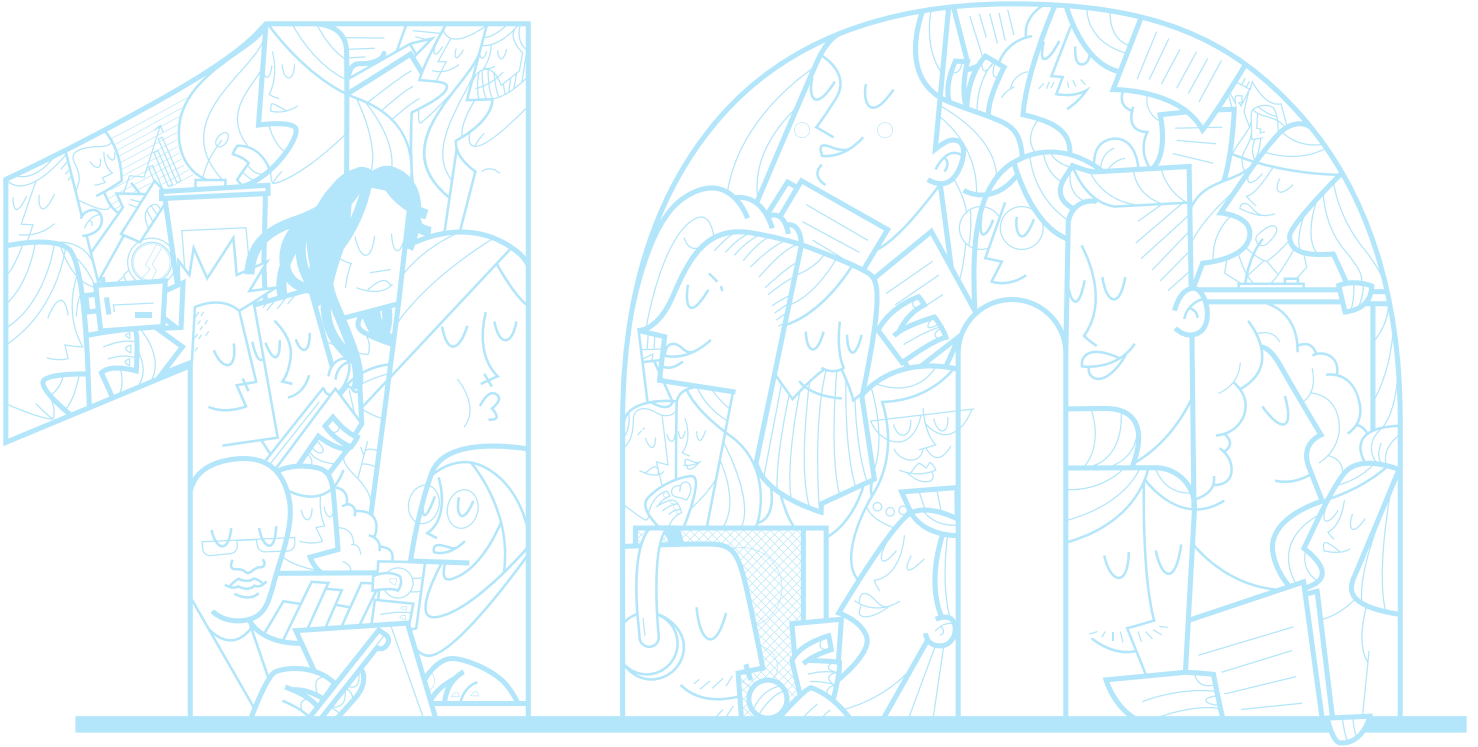
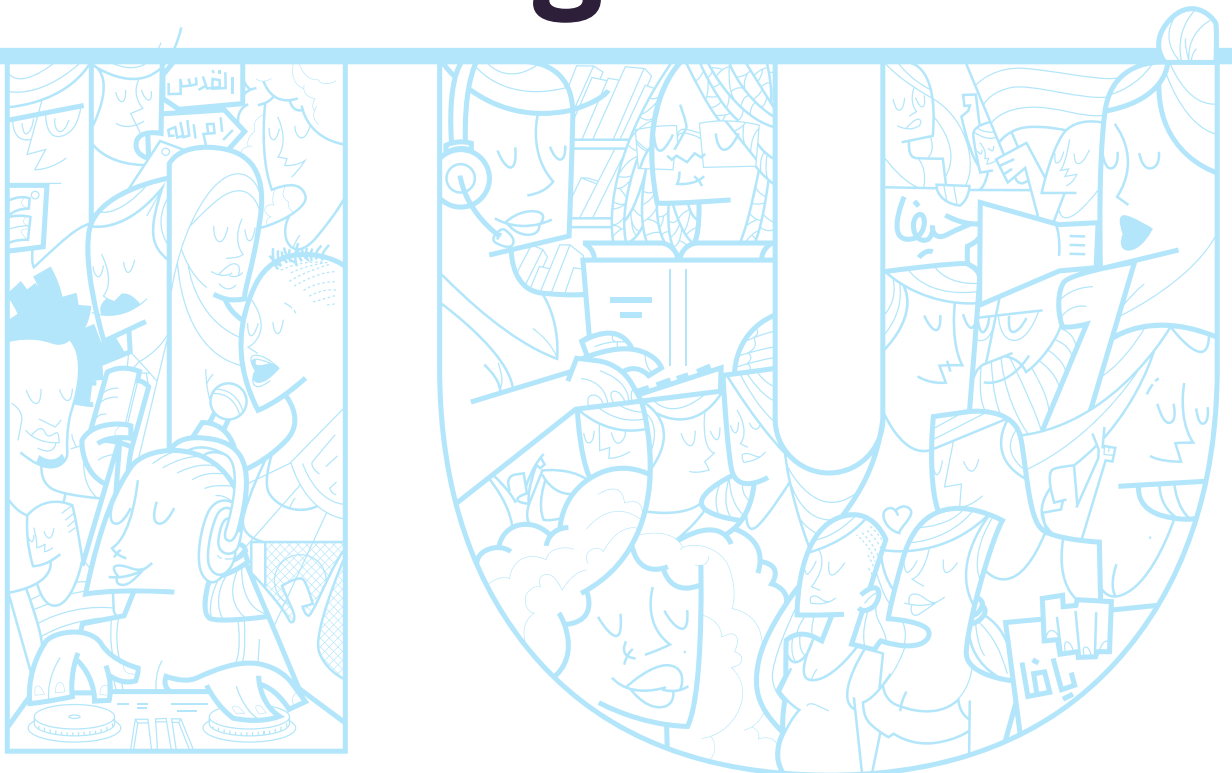


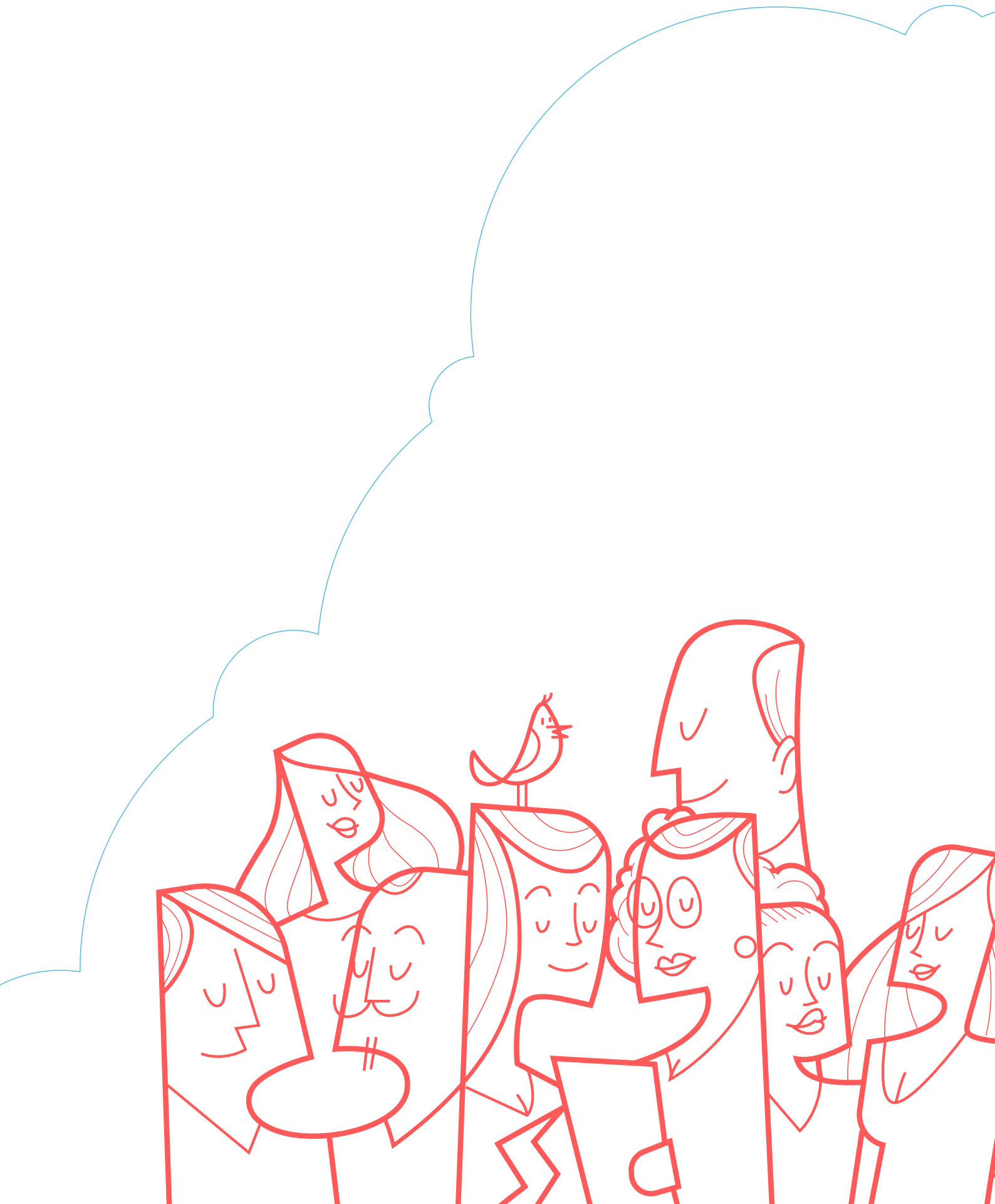
Ten Years of alQaws:
**Looking Back,
Pressing Ahead**





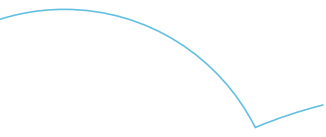
Ten Years of alQaws:
**Looking Back,
Pressing Ahead**







Dear Friends,



Although turmoil and uncertainty about the future encircle us yet again, the closing of one year always brings with it the potential for renewal—for spotting hope on the horizon of the new year. This year, we celebrate an important milestone not only for the queer community in Palestine, but for our whole society: 10 years since the formation of alQaws, Palestinian society's largest and most influential organization for building strong LGBT/queer communities and for bringing about a social and cultural upheaval when it comes to our society's response to gender and sexual diversity.

Since self-reflection, ongoing critical analysis, and a desire for change have always driven alQaws' work, it may come as no surprise that we take this ten-year anniversary as an opportunity not only to celebrate, but also to assess and evaluate. After all, there is no pre-determined path to creating the just society we envision—it takes hard work, perseverance despite scant resources (whether financial, emotional, or otherwise), and determined optimism. This year's annual report thus does more than look back on the previous year; it overviews the highlights and major achievements from 10 years of activities and growth, recognizing how far we've come and implicitly projecting how far we should aim for the next ten years. At our annual leadership retreat in early December, we took the opportunity to ask individual activists to reflect on what alQaws means to them—these testimonials appear throughout the report as well, since alQaws' activists' experiences, needs, desires, and capacities are the driving force of our work.

If you've been following alQaws for the past ten years, or only for the last year, or even if this is your first introduction (welcome!), we invite you to voice your support for this movement toward a Palestinian society that embraces all forms of diversity. The most impactful way to do so is by donating to us (at www.alqaws.org), particularly since many foundations and donors have tired of the seemingly intractable political situation we have no choice but to continually find ways to work within. More than ever, we need a strong base of donors who can stand with us, hopeful and inspired by what is possible in the years to come.

Whether you are a long-time follower or supporter of alQaws, or you're learning about us for the first time, we enthusiastically share with you our story of the last ten years, as well as our hopes and desire for the next ten.

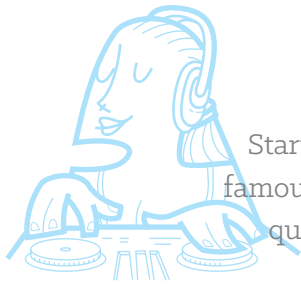
kindest regards,
 alQaws Activists, Board, Staff



alQaws'

Major Milestones

Early Development (pre-registration)



Started alQaws famous monthly queer parties

2001

Began running local LGBTQ projects in Jerusalem



2004

Focused on expanding beyond Jerusalem to build a national leadership



2006

Organizational History



Underwent the processes to formally register alQaws

2007

Launched Alkhat - Listening and Information Line hotline with Aswat - Palestinian Gay Women

2008

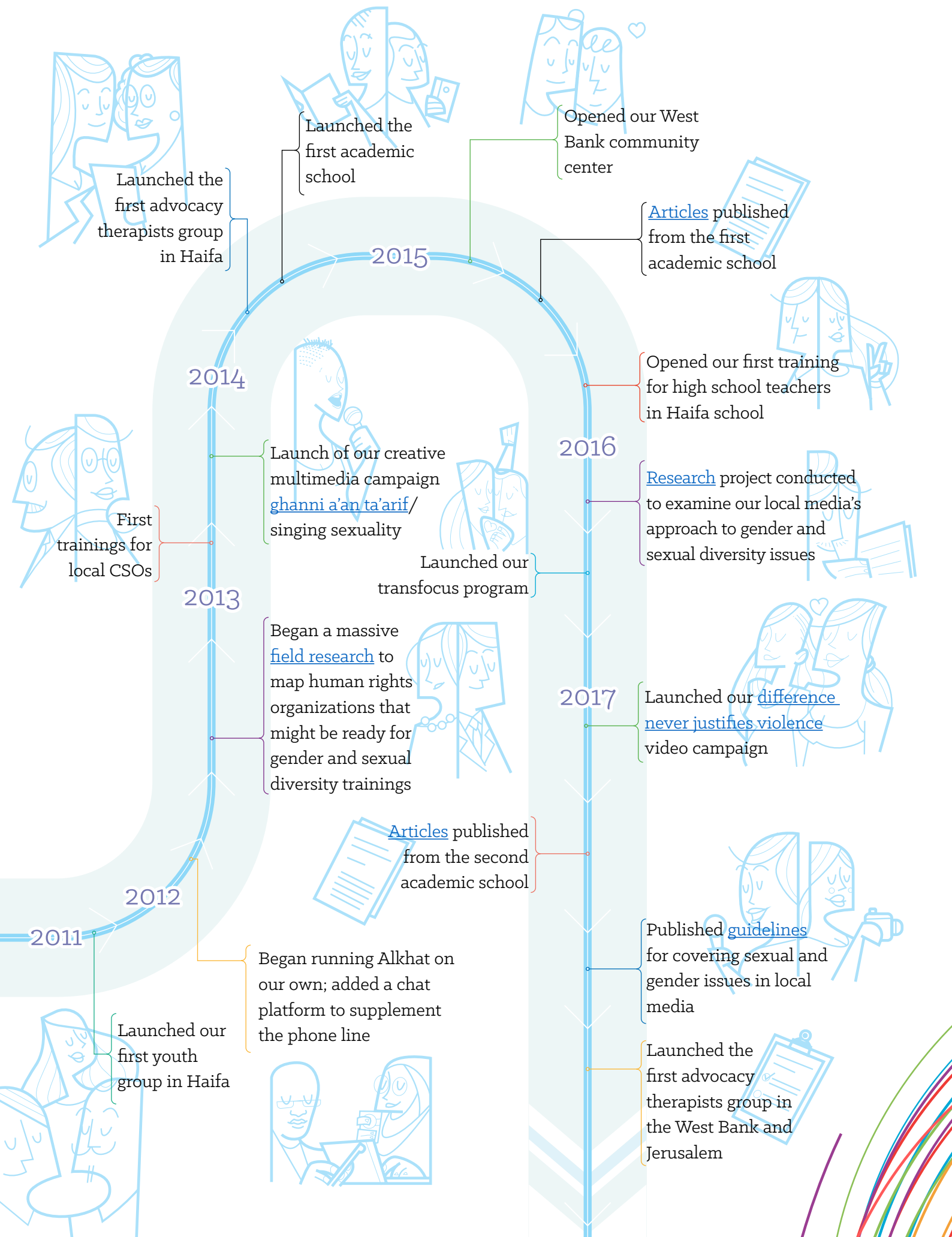
2009

2010

Began building a local leadership in Haifa, Yaffa, and Ramallah



For more information on alQaws' recent achievements, see our annual reports from [2014](#), [2015](#), and [2016](#).



2011

Launched our first youth group in Haifa

Began running Alkhat on our own; added a chat platform to supplement the phone line

2012

Articles published from the second academic school

Began a massive field research to map human rights organizations that might be ready for gender and sexual diversity trainings

2013

First trainings for local CSOs

Launch of our creative multimedia campaign ghanni a'an ta'arif/singing sexuality

Launched our transfocus program

2014

Launched the first advocacy therapists group in Haifa

Launched the first academic school

2015

Opened our West Bank community center

Articles published from the first academic school

2016

Opened our first training for high school teachers in Haifa school

Research project conducted to examine our local media's approach to gender and sexual diversity issues

2017

Launched our difference never justifies violence video campaign

Published guidelines for covering sexual and gender issues in local media

Launched the first advocacy therapists group in the West Bank and Jerusalem

Celebrating 10 years of LGBT Queer Grassroots Organizing in Palestinian Society

Beginning as a conversation between a small group of individuals seeking a larger, more supportive community and ready to organize toward social change, alQaws gradually became the well-recognized, publicly visible, and internationally known formal organization it is today.

Over the past decade, alQaws has grown and professionalized as an organization, gained momentum and influence, but has always stayed true to its grassroots core.

While maintaining the vital direct services launched by alQaws because they were otherwise unavailable in our society—including our National Hotline, Transfocus program, friendly therapists list, and more—we have also made great strides in building strong local and national LGBT/Queer communities, in our networking and advocacy with influential CSOs and professionals in key social institutions, and in our outreach to youth and the broader public with creative and dynamic media campaigns.

Our work is grassroots, locally led and locally relevant, and reaches across divisions—colonial, cultural, social, economic, etc.—to foster a society-wide embrace of diversity and difference. Working across individual, community, and society-wide levels, alQaws has been working since its formation to lead a major and meaningful shift in our society's attitude and behavior toward LGBTQ people, as well as gender and sexual diversity topics more broadly.

“
*I am part of
alQaws because
I am committed
to be that person
I needed when I
was in my youth
years looking for
a community and
support*
”



The beautiful thing about the steady process of institutionalizing alQaws' work during the last decade was the fact it was rooted in the commitment of cumulative effort and activism, and not suffocating rules and bureaucracy



Despite the costs and challenges, we work with our communities throughout historic Palestine. We defiantly challenge colonial borders and decades of Israeli fragmentation policies and apartheid to work with our communities wherever they are—whether in our established hub locations and working spaces in Yaffa, East Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Haifa, or in our continually growing network throughout Palestine, including in rural and isolated areas. Our physical presence is further expanded with a virtual presence accessible anywhere, anytime: on our main website, via social media, through our national listening and information line (alkhat.org) website, and more. After increasing our investment in media strategy over the last year, our social media presence and reach has experienced immense growth, reaching our largest audience ever in 2017 and setting the stage for our planned efforts in 2018 to produce new accessible, high quality media content that will connect with and inspire audiences across Palestinian society and beyond.



The unique thing about alQaws approach is that everyone is involved, and we as activists create the work—it is not dictated by disconnected professional staff

As we have been since our formation as a small group, we continue to be sensitive to the fact that communities in different areas and from different backgrounds have unique needs, and so we engage ever-more diverse participation in shaping our institution and programs. Our national leadership has grown from 12 to 65, and we continually work to make sure diverse voices are represented and heard.

What alQaws has Learned About Change

Our work has grown immensely in scope and reach over the last ten years, despite a frequent scarcity of resources and the challenges of living and working under the systemic crises of occupation, discrimination, and fragmentation.





alQaws forces me to look outside my comfortable bubble and exposes me to diverse experiences from different places throughout Palestine



Through trial and error, personal and collective experience, and a relentless focus on self-reflection and hearing from as many voices as possible, we have learned that meaningful social change is incremental: it comes from within each individual, gains strength between individuals and in communities, and makes a lasting impact when shared across a society. We also know that we must be willing to adapt to changes at an organizational level, particularly as our leadership and base comprise increasingly diverse voices, needs, and desires. Our leadership retreats always include an open, reflective process that allows for truly transformative results and shapes our everyday working practices and priorities.

The last few years have been particularly invigorated by a spirit of experimentation, as we have designed, tested, and continually refined new strategies for partnering with prominent, influential, and grassroots civil society and cultural institutions and actors. In 2017, alQaws continued to engage hundreds of activists, teachers, journalists, therapists, university students, and civil society organizations on how to improve our society's approach to sexual and gender diversity. We have also continued to grow our leadership base, providing opportunities for LGBTQ youth to confidently and creatively engage their peers and broader society on issues important to them.



I am part of alQaws because I want to be part of a real movement that is committed to change, even if this change is slow and sometimes can't be seen

I feel when we talk about alQaws we are talking about ourselves and all of the experiences we lived, this is how the work is built.



A Decade of Work — Linking Three Areas: Individual, Community, Society

alQaws works occurs across three interconnected levels, believing that change is rooted in supported individuals, sustained in strong communities, and amplified to create an engaged society. This structure for our work directly emerged from the desires of alQaws' activists to build initiatives that speak to and inspire them.

At these three levels—individual, community, and society/culture—alQaws disrupts sexual and gender-based oppression and challenges patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial regulation of our sexualities and bodies. alQaws builds strong local queer communities, as well as works collaboratively to transform Palestinian society's perspectives on gender and sexual diversity, homosexuality and LGBTQ issues, and to struggle for broader social justice.

Our programs across these areas support and advocate for diverse LGBTQ individuals and their families, create opportunities that inspire youth to become community leaders, develop educational materials to train civil society organizations and counseling professionals, and challenge social norms and common misperceptions with far-reaching media and cultural initiatives.



*I learned here
that change can
happen when we
take what we talk
inside our groups
and share it with
outsiders*



Empowering and Serving Individuals

AlKhat National Hotline

2017 marks the 7th year of alKhat Listening and Information, our national activist-run hotline and chat platform providing support for individuals and the general community to privately and safely reach out for assistance, support, or information on LGBTQ issues. Our efforts to continually improve the hotline through volunteer training, new platforms and services, and increased outreach through publicity campaigns have paid off: over the last three years we received hundreds of calls/chat each year. From our introduction of the hotline in 2010, we increased calls 400%, from 56 calls in 2010 to nearly 300 in 2017.

TransFocus

A few years ago, we realized that alKhat could better serve the needs of the increasing number of transgender and questioning individuals who came to us for support. A year later, in 2016, we launched our TransFocus program, a peer-to-peer support service that offers informational resources as well as emotional support and one-on-one counseling to individuals (who reach out to us through alKhat or otherwise) in the process of exploring their gender identity, including those who want to seek legal and/or medical procedures and must navigate complex institutional and bureaucratic processes to do so. Since the launch of this program, we've supported 12-15 individuals each year. Our new goal for TransFocus is to ensure that transgender individuals feel empowered to lead within alQaws.

Building Communities

Youth Groups

Our monthly youth forums, student groups, and activist spaces throughout Palestine provide dynamic spaces for locally-relevant discussions about the lives and experiences of Palestinian LGBTQ youth. Over the course of several months, our ongoing "My Self, My Sexuality, and Society: Knowledge and Impact" counselor- and activist-facilitated youth groups spark individual



In alQaws I don't need to be the "star" in order that my voice and ideas will be heard



growth and reflection, build community, and inspire activism and leadership amongst around 15 new participants each group. They are discussion and activity spaces for LGBTQ Palestinian youth to examine cultural and political aspects of sexual and gender diversity issues, to voice and discuss personal opinions, and to make their first steps toward becoming community activists, ensuring a sustainable, cohesive community and a strong, dynamic future for alQaws.

Since establishing them, these groups have taken place across our hub locations (Haifa in 2012 and 2014; Yaffa in 2015; Jerusalem in 2013 and 2016; and Ramallah in 2012 and 2017), and are now expanding further, with a new group that began in late 2017 in Nazareth, and more to come. We continue to invest in reaching out to individuals and groups in small towns and remote locations; for instance, the large majority of our youth group participants in East Jerusalem come from small villages in Jerusalem, including Jabal Almukaber, Sour Baher, Ras Alamoud, as well as more than 20% from the old city of Jerusalem.

West Bank Organizing

Reflective of the diverse backgrounds of our members, since its founding alQaws has worked across the boundaries that divide Palestinian society. Over time, we have institutionalized this work in various hub areas in order to reach even further into our society and to accommodate our continually growing activists' base. In September 2015, to respond to the needs of a growing activist community in the West Bank, we opened our Ramallah Community Center, which holds regular leadership and activist meetings, a youth group, and a variety of social and cultural activities. Each month, 30-45 people attend these activities, which are organized by our West Bank community organizer staff member and a diverse local leadership base. While the Ramallah Center is our current main hub for our West Bank work, we run a dedicated outreach program to individuals in Bethlehem, Nablus, and in smaller towns. The growing desire to organize more public, visible events amongst our local West Bank activists also lead to holding a regular West Bank version of our monthly discussion



When I first heard about alQaws it was linked to the term “activist” and “activism” and it wasn’t clear what that meant, but once I joined the leadership I understood the meaning of this.



series [Hawamesh](#), which originated in Haifa. Hawamesh discussion forums are unique for exposing alQaws’ work and vision to audiences who might not otherwise engage with it.

Local/National Leadership

alQaws was built, and continues to be built and refined, through intensive leadership retreats that bring together local activists from the various locations where we work (from East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Haifa, and Yaffa). Due to our relentless dedication to supporting youth to take leadership roles, our national leadership base grew from 12 in our first year to 65 today. At retreats, alQaws activists come together twice a year to discuss various topics related to their role in alQaws and alQaws’ work in general; we continually collectively ask who we are as an organization, and how we want to achieve the change we seek. Since our leadership has grown so large, in 2017 we began to design a new format for our retreats in order to maintain them as a forum for deep individual and community growth. In early December, we held a leadership retreat celebrating our 10-year anniversary, with panels dedicated to broad individual and organizational reflection.

Transforming Society and Culture

More than ever, alQaws’ work takes place in public forums, as not only has the openness toward our work increased, but also the demand for the knowledgeable perspective we provide to civil society organizational partners and individual professionals.

While much of this work incrementally evolves into advocacy actions led by partners who are best-positioned to spark change in their fields, we have also recognized the need to dedicate resources to creating our cultural campaigns. The success of our creative multi-media projects—our 2013 [Ghanni A’an Ta’arif/Singing Sexuality music project](#) and our 2017 [Difference Never Justifies Violence video project](#) (read about them below)—are examples of the scope and impact such projects can take.



Educational Trainings with CSOs

Since launching our large-scale initiative to engage human rights and civil society organizations in 2014, we have provided around 100 training hours per year to dozens of organizations (including 19 organizations in 2017 alone). This initiative began with a massive [field research](#) in 2013 to identify potential partners: organizations ready to address gender and sexual diversity in their work. Participants in our CSO trainings increase their knowledge and awareness of LGBTQ and gender and sexual diversity issues, and we cater the format and content to organizations' needs and requests. The training sessions are a safe space for participants to explore their attitudes toward sexual and gender diversity issues and link this to their responsibilities as educators, human rights defenders, feminist and political activists, and more. Participants in these trainings range from experienced professional CSO staff to university faculty members to youth students and younger CSO staff, all who come from diverse communities and cities across Palestine. In 2017, those we reached included university students and faculty (mainly from psychology and social work fields, including at Birzeit, Bethlehem, and An-Najah Universities), social workers from organizations working with youth in East Jerusalem, teachers in high schools, youth groups, and staff from various organizations working on sexuality, violence against women, and youth and feminist issues. In the coming months, we will again be conducting trainings at schools, which increasingly reach out to us to request education on these topics. Regardless of the civil society actors involved, we design our trainings as an intentional space to discuss gender and sexual diversity issues in a positive environment that combines expanding knowledge with the more important challenge of confronting and changing attitudes and misconceptions about these issues in Palestine. As we have refined and formalized our approach to trainings, we began to expand our trainer teams, providing professional training and supervision for trainers which streamlines the process and responds to the increasing desire in our society to engage with alQaws' message.

Therapists Advocacy Groups

The end of 2017 closes our fourth year of our Professional Advocacy Group for Palestinian therapists in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and in '48 areas. This initiative was developed out of an intensive strategic planning, in which we realized that we had the capacity to spark change in some of the most well-known, established, and influential institutions in our society (and that our society was ready for us to do so). Our professional advocacy strategy begins with careful field research to identify potential partners and opportunities for intervention, and progresses toward peer-to-peer advocacy to amplify change within a field.

Our therapists' advocacy initiative includes monthly groups (including a West Bank group as of 2017) for mental health professionals to focus on the sexual and gender dimensions in therapy. Group participants have continued on to lead advocacy actions (like a National Study Day) that, along with our parallel work training counseling center staff teams, are sparking field-wide shifts and yielding new practices for counseling LGBTQ individuals, any individual with concerns regarding gender and gender diversity, and their families.

In 2017, we advanced our work with therapists even further by recruiting a professional team (including staff from the most well-respected counseling centers in our society) to write our society's first professional and ethical guidelines on sexual and gender diversity issues for Palestinian therapists: *The Professional Therapists' Best Practices Guidebook: Sexual and Gender Diversity Issues* (to be published in March 2017).

Media and Cultural Programming

Academic School

After years of participating in local and international intellectual debates and engaging academic communities on issues of settler-colonialism, queer and feminist theory, homonationalism and pinkwashing, indigenous and people of color organizing, and more, all in relation to the Palestinian context, in 2014 we formalized our local approach to engaging academics and intellectual critique with our Sexuality School "Sexual Politics in the Colonial Context



of Palestine.” We now hold a three-day academic conference every other year, dedicating the year following each “school” to publishing essays drawn from the panels on prominent Arabic websites, like the special issue published in [Jadal magazine in 2015](#), and the new issue published this December in [Jadaliyya](#).

Local Media

In 2015-2016, we conducted a [research](#) that explored both the media trends regarding sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian media, and journalists’ and editors’ conceptions about these issues. This was the first step in a longer-term effort to engage local media in our effort to shift mainstream perceptions and attitudes about diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in our society. We already held a training for journalists and worked with media partners to publish the “[Sexual and Gender Diversity Media Reference Guideline](#)” and our next exciting step will be to invest in writing our own media for publication in relevant local media venues.



Ghanni A'an Ta'arif / Singing Sexuality

In 2013, we held a live concert for over 200 audience members to enjoy and celebrate the release of the musical project [Singing Sexuality/ Ghanni A'an Ta'arif](#), comprising 8 songs created in a collaboration between young activists, artists and musicians, which exposed audiences to LGBTQ issues in a creative and popular cultural format. The album was released on CD (distributed in Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon) and online along with music videos and an interactive website.



Difference Never Justifies Violence

Created with our partner 7amleh: The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, our [Difference Never Justifies Violence](#) video and media campaign exposing and decrying violence against LGBTQs has reached a vast audience, with the videos receiving more than a third of a million views and counting since they were released this summer. This reach far expands the great reach we had for our



Singing Sexuality album and project released only a couple of years ago, underscoring a growing readiness for our message, despite an expected degree of backlash for our increased exposure of difficult, but important conversations around gender and sexual diversity. A first-of-its-kind public campaign on these issues in our society, the videos raised awareness of micro-aggressions against LGBTQs in everyday discourse, workplaces, schools, and families. Breaking with the norm of keeping silent about such issues, the videos addressed not only the worst, most exceptional forms of violence against LGBTQs, but also everyday micro-aggressions that harm LGBTQs in more subtle ways. In this way, the videos spoke to our society at large, revealing LGBTQ issues as relevant to the whole society, and not just a narrow subset. The stories that informed the videos' content were drawn from real LGBTQ youths' experiences, who were involved in the process of shaping the campaign's message and approach.

Learn More About alQaws

After ten years of work, we have so much more to share than what we could include in this report! Explore the links below and those embedded throughout this report to learn more about our work, read reports, watch videos, listen to music, etc.

Listen/Read/Watch Further: A Selection of alQaws' Projects & Publications

- Singing Sexuality // Musical [album](#), 2013
- Attitudes of Palestinian Civil Society Organizations Toward Sexual & Bodily Rights // [Field research](#), 2013
- Sexual Politics in the Colonial Context of Palestine, Issue #1 // Academic articles published in [Jadal](#) Journal, 2015
- Attitudes & Trends of Palestinian Local Media // [Field research](#), 2016
- Alkhat – Listening & Information // Introduction [video](#), 2016
- Alkhat – Listening & Information // [Stickers](#), 2016
- Tips for Therapists: How to Show Respect for Trans Individuals // [Poster](#), 2017
- Difference Never Justifies Violence // Social media [campaign](#), 2017
- “Sexual Identity” // [Infographic](#), 2017
- Sexual and Gender Diversity Media Reference [Guideline](#) // 2017
- Sexual Politics in the Colonial Context of Palestine, Issue #2 // Academic articles published in [Jadaliyya](#), 2017

We hope you will be inspired to contribute to furthering our work with a donation.

Donate to alQaws:

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Donation via [Bank Transfer](#)

Send your check to: P.O. Box 1616, Jerusalem 91016

Thank you for your support



للتعددية الجنسيّة والجندريّة في المجتمع الفلسطينيّ
alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society

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