Antwerp and Palestine collaborate on drama programme

Antwerp, August 2025 – The Drama programme at Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts Antwerp) and ASHTAR Theatre in Ramallah are joining forces to establish Palestine's first official bachelor programme in Drama. The three-year project, supported by the European Commission, demonstrates how art and education transcend borders.

The collaboration arose after a meeting during the Theatre Festival in 2024. It soon became clear that both institutions could strengthen each other: in their approach to drama education and in their conviction that theatre can play a role in connecting communities in a divided world.

"*We want to train our students to become committed artists who make their voices heard in social debates*," says **Clara Van den Broek**, head of the Antwerp drama programme. "*The exchange with ASHTAR is therefore not a one-way street. They have enormous experience in dealing with urgent current issues and show how theatre can respond to harsh realities. We can learn a lot from that*."

Historical parallels
The roots of both programmes lie in a similar context. The Conservatoire was founded in 1947 during the post-war reconstruction and grew out of the National Theatre, the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp. The new programme in Ramallah also has its roots in a society where uncertainty and occupation are felt on a daily basis. For both, theatre is more than just a performance: it is a form of engagement and resistance, a way to make your voice heard in times of silence.

Art as a driving force for community
The collaboration goes beyond setting up a curriculum. "*Artists play an essential role in building community and strengthening democratic values,*" says Van den Broek. *"This project shows how art can contribute to social change, even or especially in areas where democratic values are under pressure."*

Emile Saba, artistic director of ASHTAR Theatre, emphasises the mission: "*We strive for a Palestinian society in which theatre contributes to justice, freedom and equality. We want to empower young people, especially women and marginalised groups, to express themselves creatively and actively shape social change. Our Performing Arts Academy is central to this vision: it is*

a space for dialogue, development and empowerment. The collaboration with the Conservatoire helps us to achieve our goal."

Concrete steps
Preparatory visits will commence in the coming months. Subsequently, Palestinian colleagues will visit Antwerp to learn about structure, pedagogy, and administration. The Conservatoire will share knowledge about curriculum development, credit systems, and collaboration with students in workshops – essential building blocks for a recognised bachelor programme in Ramallah.

Charlotte Saelemakers, international officer at the Conservatoire: 'Our partners value us for our social engagement and artistic research. With this project, we want to contribute to a new future.'

European support
The support of the European Commission through Erasmus+ confirms the importance of arts education as a bridge between communities. This initiative not only strengthens the Conservatoire's international position, but also contributes to the development of theatre as a social force in Palestine.

Contact
Do you have any further questions or would you like to speak to someone involved? Please contact Greet Vandenbulcke at greet.vandenbulcke@ap.be or on +32 475 81 02 53.

The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, part of AP University College, is a leading institute for higher education in the arts. The Conservatoire is the only institution in Flanders to offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes in music, drama and dance, as well as a graduate programme in stage and event techniques. In addition, there are educational programmes that allow students to specialise in teaching within their artistic field. Innovation, interdisciplinary research and close collaboration with the professional field are central to its approach.