Palestine-Net: Life in Palestine

[Palestine-Net](#): [Life in Palestine](#): Interview with **Mr. Hisham Zarour** from the **[Carma Cyber Club](#)** (Internet Cafe', CCC for short)
Interview date: May 7, 2000 (in English).
Palestine-Net met Mr. Zarour, cafe' manager at Carma in Ramallah (6th floor, Lu'lu'at Al-Manarah building - near the city center) and conducted the following interview:

- **PN**: Mr. Zarour, on behalf of our cyber audience, I'd like to thank you for making this possible. Let's get started - would you please introduce yourself to our visitors
  HZ: Thank you for coming. It's our pleasure.
  My name is Hisham Zarour. I am from Alquds (Jerusalem). I got my Bsc in hydrogeology from Saudi Arabia and a Masters degree in the same subject from the UK. I have worked for ARIJ, Alquds Newspaper, the UNDP and PWA. Then I established the Carma Cyber Club.

- **PN**: When was Carma established?
  HZ: July 9, 1998. I felt the need for such a facility and realized its potential (there was one small iCafe' then - K5M). We wanted it to be the best Internet cafe' in Palestine - if not in the whole Middle east.
  At that time we started with 8 PCs, two of which were exclusively for females. Prices were a bit high - 25 NIS an hour (6 USD).

- **PN**: What about the current situation now? I see you have expanded even the space. What equipment and services do you provide?
  HZ: Yes, we now have 150 sq. meters of space. Currently, there are 30 PCs with 11 to be added soon, for a total of 41. All our PCs are multimedia enabled. We have two printers, a scanner a digital camera and a web cam. We are adding two more printers and another scanner soon. We have 4 well-trained staff who provide services and assistance to CCC visitors.
  As you can see, we have a TV lounge as well and we have automated check in and check out (using barcode). Our web cam and scanner services are free. Currently, we

have a 128K link and we are upgrading to 256 K in the very near future. Oh, and don't forget our free e-mail.
We also provide all sorts of hot and cold drinks, snacks and sandwitches.

- **PN**: And the prices for your services?
  HZ: Prices dropped a little thanks to competition but it was until July 1999, when we took the initiative and dropped it down to 4 NIS per hour (one US Dollar) which is the current rate. You can say it is now an affordable service for the average Palestinian citizen. As I mentioned earlier, scanner and webcam are free, but we charge for printing (0.5 NIS per page), and, of course, we charge for food and drinks.

- **PN**: Who comes to Carma and Internet cafe's in general? It seems few people rely on home conections to the Internet.
  HZ: Although our customers represents all walks of life, they are mainly students and visitors (tourists). For a large number of users, it is cheaper to surf the Internet here and we provide a faster link to the internet than that could be obtained at homes. There are issues related to the communications infrastructure and cost of ownership. Plus, people get technical assistance and work in a more social atmosphere.

- **PN:** And what do clients do here?
  HZ: Well, if I were to rank usage in order, I would say they search and browse, chat, use e-mail, use communications over the net and use applications (wordprocessing, drawing, games etc.) and print.

- **PN**: One of the potentials of the Internet is cheap communications, networking and outreach. For Palestinians in the homeland and the diaspora, this is a great potential as it keeps people in touch, help educate, preserve culture and coordinate and cooperate. In fact, Palestine Net receives many messages from Palestinians around the world (and other interested people) who are interested in comunicating with people here. How can Carma help in this effort?
  HZ: At the moment, we provide simple pen pal matching if we receive requests, but this is a great idea. let's work towards a more structured way of providing a channel of communication and interaction. This will be implemented in steps and announced on Palestine Net and here at Carma. Let's plan a scheduled chat first.

- **PN**: We would like to thank you for your time and we wish you all the best. Please feel free to add anything you like about points we did not cover or if you have other plans for the near future.
  HZ: Thank you. We also wish palestine net the same. I would like to thank our customers and welcome new ones. We are continously improving our services and equipment. Our website will be developed and provide more services in addition to the existing ones. We are working toward a more reliable power source (we do have UPS now but would like to take care of extended outage). We also [welcome comments](#) from our clients about our services and how we can serve them better.