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Editorial: Once again, the interdependence of women's rights and national rights

Despite the fact that the role of women in the current Intifada has been questioned and underestimated by many people, it is important to stress that women are playing a very important -- although not highly visible -- role, indeed. Women's roles manifest themselves on three major levels: family, national, and institutional. As far as the family level is concerned, women provide comfort and security, promote unity, patience and love among family members, and often provide the means of livelihood, in a time when food, security and safety are scarce. It is the woman who provides a family with mental support, and it is the mothers and daughters who spend hours visiting their male family members in Israeli jails, protesting for their release and visiting the injured in hospitals. On a national level, women have participated enormously in peaceful national demonstrations and protests against the Israeli occupation, aggression and inhumane atrocities committed against the Palestinian nation. On the institutional level, many women's units within the Palestinian Authority ministries, along with various women NGOs, have initiated projects addressing the basic needs and constraints of women, such as poverty alleviation and unemployment.

Highlighting social issues at a time when the political and the national issues seem to deserve priority, is a trend revealing itself among organizations and unions not devoted specifically to women's issues, too. For instance, Palestinian workers are demanding the establishment of a national anti-employment fund and the publication of the Palestinian Labor Law to guarantee laborers' rights. This demonstrates once more the compatibility between the national and the feminine, the national and the social, and the national and the democratic.

Women under the poverty line dream of jobs
Laila Abu-Khdeir, Gaza

I have interviewed a number of women who have lost their jobs as a result of the difficult economic situation since the beginning of the Intifada. They were the first to be fired as a result of the economic difficulties facing Palestinian companies and firms.

Many women were left to provide for their families and became primary breadwinners without having any previous employment experience or qualifications. Lamia, a woman from Khan Younis who is 24 years old, is responsible for her family's welfare due to her parents' illness. She is the eldest daughter and has eight other brothers and sisters. She was fired from her work as a secretary once the Intifada started, on the pretext that the travel agency she was working could no longer afford paying for a secretary. This left her helpless, looking for any possible job opportunity and calling upon organizations to help her. Zeinab, who is 29 years old and from Deir Al-Balah, is the widow of a martyr and now has to raise four children alone, with no academic or vocational qualifications.

The Working Women's Society played a major role in assisting unemployed and needy women by offering or finding job opportunities for them despite their lack of qualifications. In addition, to strengthen women's capacities the Society organized special training courses on topics related to areas of highest demand in society, providing women with assets in their job search.

A few seconds save a baby girl from being buried in her home Munir Abu-Ras, Al-Jeel Lil-Sahafah

After more than fifty years of homelessness, suffering and pain many Palestinian refugees living in Khan Younis have become refugees once again, as a result of the Israeli policy of mass home demolitions.

The Abu-Khreis family became permanent refugees after the 1948 war and were forced to settle in a small hut at the edge of Khan Younis refugee camp, with thin corrugated iron for a roof. Only two years ago, they managed to buy a small piece of land and build a house on it. With enormous effort they had eventually gathered enough money and had finally built a home for themselves and their children. They experienced a great sense of happiness to finally have a real home after so many years of homelessness and dispossession. Unfortunately, their happiness was stolen brutally by Israeli tanks, bulldozers and bullets. One day while they were at home, the family heard Israeli authorities ordering everybody in the neighborhood to evacuate their houses. Whoever refused to do so, they were told, would be buried under the wreckage. In panic and immense fear, the Abu-Khreis family started gathering the children together, and each adult took one child and called her or his name to let the other family members know that that child had been evacuated. Within minutes they all ran from house, having no time to take their official documents, valuables or even look on last time at their long-dreamt-of home. Once in a safe place, they discovered that one child was missing, Nur. Her grandmother decided to go back to the house amidst bullets flying over her head,

tanks surrounding her and bulldozers destroying the homes in the area. When she reached the door of the house, she could hear Nur crying and screaming for help, standing helplessly behind the door. The grandmother grabbed her and hugged her, and then found herself frozen in place, incapable of moving. Eventually the sound of the bulldozers approaching the house, the trembling of the walls and the fear for their lives gave her the strength to run with Nur from the house back to the rest of the family, who were anxiously awaiting them.

Now the Abu-Khreis family, along with hundreds of other families, is living in tents provided by the Red Cross. But how can a tent provide people with safety, warmth and well-being? How can tents hold the overwhelming number of homeless people and children in need of livelihood, education and security? Children can be seen sitting in a corner of the tent, trying to read a book salvaged from the wreckage, or pretending to read in to avoid eye contact with other family members in order to avoid pain and tears. What life awaits innocent children living an endless refugee life?

WATC trains women in crisis management

As part of the "Advocacy of Equal Rights for Women through Strengthening the Networking of Women Political Committees and Institutions" Project, two 18-hour training courses were organized to educate women and strengthen their crisis management skills, which are desperately needed in the difficult current political situation. The first course was on "Crisis Management," concentrating on institutional crisis management. The second was entitled "Coping with Fear and Anxiety," highlighting the psychological aspect of crisis management. The courses targeted project field coordinators and volunteers working with them. The training took place in the northern, central and southern parts of the West Bank, and will be soon implemented in Gaza.

WATC signs an agreement with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Empowering Women through Computer Skills

Women's Affairs Technical Committee has signed an agreement with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung to initiate and implement a project entitled "Women of the Future - Empowering Women through the Internet". Following are the main aims of the Project:

- To launch five computer centers with internet connection in five isolated areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, namely Qalqilia, Salfeet, Hebron, Gaza and Khan Younis. Five women in each center will be trained in different computer skills in order to assist visiting women and convey their knowledge to them.
- To cooperate with the following women's political committees in implementing the Project: (1) Association of Women's Committees for Social Work. (2) Union of Palestinian Women Committees. (3) Palestinian Development Society for Working

Women. (4) Union of Palestinian Working Women. These committees will be administratively responsible for the management of the centers.

- To open opportunities for women to use the internet and to be educated on computer skills and modern technology
- To reach women in isolated areas
- To promote social and cultural equality in the development of the Palestinian nation

The Project will have four phases of implementation:

1. Establishing and preparing the center
2. Training a number of women from the different women committees on computer skills to manage the centers
3. Operating the centers under the supervision of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
4. Managing and administrating the centers independently by the different women committees

It is important to note that these centers are open for all women visitors regardless of their political or religious affiliations.

Nadia: A seven-year old girl in love with poetry
Widad Al-Barguthi, Ramallah

Nadia Deeb 'Abdul-Ghani is a seven-year-old girl from Al-Bireh who embodies intelligence, a love of poetry and creativity. She has a remarkable ability to read, write and understand the poetry of famous Arab poets such as Bader Shaker Al-Sayyab, Mustafa Wahby Al-Tal, Ahmad Shawqi and Fadwa Tuqan. She loves reading poems, but prefers emotionally expressive ones that are rich in meaning and images. Anyone hearing her reciting verses for the first time would be astonished, because her pronunciation and delivery of material which is challenging even to highly-educated adults is almost unbelievable. She prefers reading poetry over watching television, saying: "Television is only seen. I do not think when I am watching. But reading makes me think deeply. And how could I write if I don't read first?" Despite her young age, she speaks with the manner of a confident and mature young woman.

Wasan Daraghmeh: winner of a gold medal in Saddam's sports championships
Shahnaz Abdul Razzaq, Nablus

Wasan Daraghmeh, a 20-year-old woman from Tubas, is studying physical education at An-Najah National University. She was finally given the chance to participate in Saddam's Sports Championships in Iraq. She participated in three different competitions, and won the 200-meter running competition.

Wasan described her experience and the problems she faced. The lack of knowledge as far as sports are concerned was a main constraint in addition to the lack of adequate experience in comparison to other participants from other Arab countries. However, she stressed that traditional and social values represent the greatest obstacles, with the power to destroy one's dreams and hopes. Under social and family pressure, she was forced to give up participating in the same championship last year, because her family members and relatives were not willing to let her violate social norms and participate in a regional championship, which would mean traveling abroad. It took her a whole year to convince her family, with the help of her teachers, that sports was her passion and that she was determined to find a way to continue. Finally she managed to participate, and proved her society's stereotypes wrong. She returned with a golden medal, proving the capacity of women to excel in activities that society perceives as being limited to men.

Israeli settlers murder even our bees!
Malki Suleiman, Ramallah

Hilaleh 'Aleyan, or Um-Zuheir, is a 70-year-old woman from the village of Beit 'Ur. She and her late husband have spent their lives raising and caring for bees, and ultimately producing honey. She now has more than fifty years of experience with bees, and is an expert on the behavior of bees, their lifecycles and habits. She is as well acquainted with them as she is with her own children and family members! Five years ago her husband died, leaving her with a huge responsibility. Yet her lifelong participation in bee-raising and hive caretaking enabled her to continue her work without great difficulty, with her children sometimes offering their help. She believes that farming bee can provide an adequate income for a family, and even exceeded one's needs sometimes. "I have raised my six children, got them married and am still caring for them from time to time. All this could only be achieved through my bees", said Um Zuheir proudly.

She showed some distress and sadness, however, while telling about her experience with the Israeli occupying forces. "In the first Intifada, Israeli soldiers shot tear gas near the beehives and placed poison on some of the hives, destroying many of them. I had 150 beehives which produced 250kg of honey. Now I only have 50 beehives, producing 12 gallons of honey."

She has done her best to maintain her livelihood, and has become famous for her delicious and homemade honey. "Even the Israeli multi-flavored honey cannot compete with it!" she insisted.