

**Voice of Women**  
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**The Solidarity of Egyptian Women**  
**Mirvat Awad, Cairo**

There is a historical bond between Egypt and Palestine, and with the current Al Aqsa intifada the sympathy of the Egyptian people for the Palestinian people has increased. Various Egyptian media outlets have shed light on the different forms of Egyptian solidarity with the Palestinians. The solidarity has at times been so strong that Egyptians have made serious attempts to resist the Israeli occupation.

Egyptian women have played an active role in this solidarity. *Voice of Women* documented some of their comments.

Nawal, a forty-year-old woman, owns a café in Jiza. When she heard us speaking, she realized our dialect was not Egyptian. When she found out that we came from Palestine, she welcomed us warmly, telling us that she had bought a small TV in order to follow the news of the Intifada. She expressed her admiration for the determination and resistance of the Palestinian people and added, "They (the Israeli occupation) will leave Palestine just like they left the Sinai. May God brings us victory!" Nawal was deeply affected by the terrible massacre in Jenin. She said that for her, the Palestinian woman epitomizes the strength and determination of the Arab woman.

In a small home, we met thirty-five-year old Manga Fayssal in Cairo. She expressed her sorrow over the suffering experienced by Palestinians under the occupation. She sees the Palestinian women as heroes and wishes she could follow their example of defiance in the face of the occupation. Palestinian women, she adds, "provide a great symbol of endurance in circumstances forced upon them by the occupation."

### **Fifty-five percent of pregnant women suffer from anemia: Women and children in refugee camps face a health crisis**

A study of the health situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip indicates a real crisis. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics has recently issued a report on the health situation of women in refugee camps. The mortality rate for children under five years of age has reached its peak in refugee camps. The report revealed that 20.8% of children living in refugee camps and 13.9% living in villages suffer from respiratory infections. In the refugee camps of Lebanon, 35 children per 1000 die at birth; while 33 children per 1000 die in the refugee camps of Gaza.

Health problems in the occupied Palestinian territories are mainly due to the intensified attacks by Israel against the Palestinian people. The Palestinian markets lack supply items such as milk for children and adults, as well as cheese and eggs. Some health centers even lack syringes for children. The Israeli occupation policies of aggression against Palestinian civilians, ranging from air attacks to curfews and closures have a negative impact on the health of women and children. Such policies, if continued, will lead to more catastrophic results on children, whom Israel perceives as a threat because they represent the future population of Palestine.

### **On the Eve of International Women's Day: The Israeli army kills Fathiya Alawneh**

Fathiya, a 52-year-old woman who is the mother of eight, was watering the plants in her garden in Jabaa, near Jenin, when Israeli soldiers shot her in the head. Her husband, Abdel Karim Alawneh, and her eight children told us about circumstances surrounding her death.

“It was 8 a.m. and we were taking care of our little plot of land just like we've done every day over the thirty years of our marriage. She loved her children and they loved her deeply too.” Her son, Nasr, adds, “She used to work with my father with all her strength.” After she and her husband went back to the house for lunch, Fathiya decided to stay home to rest for awhile. Then she went back out to the field. “We then heard shooting,” says Nasr, “but I never thought that my mother could be involved because the Israeli tanks were far away and even if they had been close, why would they target her?” “I was scared”, says Abdel Karim, “I felt that the soldiers were close to our neighborhood (Sanour-Jabaa street) but I never imagine that Fathiya would be shot in the head...” He stops talking. “It was her... bleeding from the head and mouth, and there was also blood on her clothes. I could not believe what I saw. I tried to carry her but couldn't get very far. I started crying. It was an awful scene. Our neighbors couldn't believe what was happening. They started shouting and calling other neighbors who came to the scene. She continued bleeding for two hours. Dr. Zeid Fashafsha told us that her death resulted from

the weapons used by the Israeli soldiers. I wish I had been the one who had been killed. She's left me alone.”

And in this way, a Palestinian woman is killed by war criminals on the eve of the International Day of Women.

### **Women volunteers at the Palestine Red Crescent Society**

Thirty-five percent of the volunteers at PRCS are female. Volunteerism is one of the most important values of PRCS.

Sonia Ghaleb joined the volunteers at the Palestine Red Crescent Society in April 2001 because it offers so many forms of assistance to the Palestinian people. “People encouraged me to start to volunteer at the PRCS. I like to help people and the humanitarian side of this job led me to work there. At the beginning, my parents disapproved of my job at PRCS, but eventually they agreed that both men and women live according to their values. I started to work in the field hospital in Balou’ area and we used to treat the injured during clashes between stone throwers and the Israeli army. I was faced with danger most of the time. Once, a man was wounded and left bleeding in the main street to Jerusalem and my colleagues and I couldn’t save him because of the Israeli gunfire directed at us. The young man lost his life. We all need to be trained in first aid because it is important. I like the atmosphere at PRCS because there is a strong sense of team work and commitment.”

### **Despite many obstacles, services continue**

Gaza – Despite ongoing Israeli aggression and repeated invasions of the northern part of Gaza, the Women's Health Center, a project of the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Jabalya Refugee Camp, continues to provide health services to the residents of the camp. During the first quarter of the year the center served 1671 women. Ghada Skik, the director of the center, said that 824 women benefited from the clinic’s health services, 204 received natural therapy treatments, 81 women participated in recreational activities and approximately 70 participated in lectures on personal hygiene during pregnancy. The center also offered psychological services to 145 women and children. Other services, such as the distribution of milk for children, were also provided to 92 individuals. Some were offered free medical treatment by the center. The health team made 214 home visits to help women identify their health needs. In addition, several lectures were held for women and teenage girls on different topics, including health, social development, education and nutrition.

## **Women who have delivered at checkpoints**

Tahreer will hear the story of her birth when she grows up. Dozens of Palestinian babies have been born at Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and some of their stories have been included in a documentary recording Palestinian life under the occupation. Viewers will be exposed to how the occupation impacts people's lives and how it robs Palestinians of the right to life and pursuit of happiness.

“A Testimony of Birth” is a film produced by Alyaa Arsaghli. It sheds light on Israel's violation of the most basic human right: the right to be born. What annoys the Israeli soldiers so much when a pregnant woman wants to pass through the checkpoint so she can get to the hospital and deliver her baby? Is she carrying a bomb in her stomach? In some cases, her innocent child will be served the death penalty by these young soldiers even before she or he is born.

The 17-minute film is divided into 3 parts. During the first part, women speak about their personal experiences at checkpoints. The second part discusses the UNFPA (a UN fund to support the Palestinian people), and the final section focuses on the experiences of female medical staff.

While the film is focused on a specific message, it also provides a general picture of the humanitarian suffering of Palestinians at the closures and checkpoints imposed by the Israeli occupation. It also documents training sessions offered to women in the community providing essential information on pregnancy and how to deal with different circumstances that could arise, particularly the problem of delivery if soldiers prevent the woman in labor from going to the hospital. One scene, in which a child takes his first steps, serves as a striking metaphor of the determination of the Palestinian people to overcome all obstacles that are put in their path.

“A Testimony of Birth” exposes the behavior of Israeli soldiers towards civilians, especially when they occupy homes forcefully and without excuse. The documentary is also a call to peace by the Palestinian women who carry and deliver their babies under these circumstances. It is not only a testimony of the birth of infants but also of a whole nation striving for peace, freedom and hope.

## **Letters about a single wound**

*I send a message from the injured Palestinian heart to the world, of the suffering of Palestinian children, youth and elders, of the suffering that every individual lives on this earth. Children die on their way to school; children cannot play or enjoy their childhood*

*because of Israeli tanks; Palestinian mothers deliver their babies at checkpoints, and sometimes they die because they are not allowed to reach hospitals.*

With these powerful words, 13-year-old Ahmad Khali expresses his views of the situation he lives in day and night. He wrote these words spontaneously, expressing the suffering of all Palestinians.

His letter is part of the Letters Without Borders project launched by Dr. Mohamed Shtayeh, PECDAR Director, in coordination with Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah. The aim of the project is to promote creative writing by youth.

Another letter, addressed to Kofi Anan, was written by 14-year-old Wassim Jaafari. The letter demands that UN resolutions be applied on the ground. "I am a 14-year-old young man. I live in Jerusalem, in Palestine, where I was born. I hope for a better future, in which freedom prevails. I respectfully request that your esteemed organization implement its resolutions. We have been suffering for more than 55 years now and we want international law to be applied in our country as it is in other countries, where people have been freed from colonialism, which we have not. We strive for the peace and security that we have never seen in our lives."

Wassim's words seem beyond his years, demonstrating how Palestinian children know their rights and demand that their land be liberated just as adults do. Instead of occupying themselves with the games which usually interest children, they bear the burden of their nation's cause.

Haytham Jarrar wrote about checkpoints during the holidays. He says "I chose to talk about my experience because I was deeply affected. Despite my happiness during the Eid (religious holiday), I was saddened to see my uncle and cousins spending 6 hours trying to get from Jenin to Ramallah. It had a negative impact on my feelings." Haytham asked in his letter for the Israeli military to remove the checkpoints and leave Palestine.

Rafat, 15, chose to address his message to the Arab leaders because he follows the Arab League meetings and the decisions they make on TV. He says, however, that none of their decisions have practical value. He starts his letter as follows: "My letter won't start as the usual letters but I will not forget to greet you with Salam. My objective is not to praise you and I really don't know if you will read it, or if the letter will even reach you. You are not strong enough to face the USA because it controls you." His letter reflects the desperation of Palestinians for the Arab and Muslim peoples to overcome their weaknesses and stand up to world powers on behalf of the Palestinian cause.

Mr. Hisham Hamad, an Arabic teacher at St. George's School in Jerusalem, was surprised at what the students wrote. "I found students reacting to events in a surprising manner.

Their reactions were not limited to their cause but extended to larger issues within the Arab nation, since the Iraqi cause has deeply affected them. Others showed interest in other world events.

Dr. Mohamed Baraghit, an expert in psychology, mentioned that the many hardships children are experiencing in the context of the Intifada must be taken into consideration in order to understand their reactions. When a child hears and sees and lives such events, he will spontaneously have an opinion about them. These traumatic events have continued for more than two years, without a doubt leaving scars and powerful images in their minds.

Those most deeply affected in the society will be the most able to express their feelings towards violence. This is what has happened to these children. According to the Children's Defense International Movement, Palestinian children constitute the group most affected by the aggression of the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians. This is a clear violation of the International Agreement on Children's Rights.