

**Voice of Women  
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**Editorial**

The results of this year's general secondary school examination are more than surprising. They overturn many expectations. It was not unusual that female students again received top marks in most areas of study. What is most surprising is that the top students came from the areas of most intense shelling, destruction, curfews and closures. These include areas like Rafah and Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip and Nablus, Tulkarm and Qalqilia in the West Bank. About 77% of the students who received distinctions are female.

It is not only that these results defied the Israeli objective to demoralize the people. It also challenges the prevalent view that females are less determined or strong-willed than males; less able to overcome obstacles. In their high performance, female students demonstrate a commitment to the cause and to their country that defies both the occupation and social stereotypes. The ability of both male and female students to continue despite all the difficulties is a great testimony to their identity and allegiance.

What are the practical implications of this achievement? Granted, the current economic and political situation makes the prospects of higher studies and good employment more difficult for everyone. Nevertheless, officials responsible for the educational sector must make every effort to give these distinguished students all the opportunities at their disposal for higher study and advancement. It is essential that our society maximize the talents it possesses, especially by giving females a level of incentive commensurate with their abilities. It is an issue that must not be made to wait to be translated into a reality, as this will affect our social structure as well as the outcome of our political struggle.

**Women of Jenin Camp and the UN Report**

The UN report on the Israeli attack on Jenin Refugee Camp places blame almost equally on the Israeli army and the camp residents. "We are to blame and they are blameless,"

one of the camp women, Im Mohammad Samarah, says sarcastically. She stands near her destroyed house. She now lives with children in a nearby village, and like other women she comes to the site of her old house as a ritual of remembrance and pain. The ruined house and 400 hundred others are testimonials to what happened last April: the destruction, the hundreds of tragic stories, and the new exodus.

Now the UN report equates the victims and the aggressors, muffling the truth. The UN's decision to send a commission of inquiry was rejected by Israel; the UN conceded and disbanded the commission. The report was screened by the US to make sure it conforms to Israeli views and interests.

“The next thing they’ll say is that we destroyed our own houses,” Im Muhammad continues. “My neighbor and her child were standing on a veranda when the Israeli army advanced, and a few moments later they were both smashed to pieces under the rubble.” She wonders what would have qualified this as a massacre in the eyes of the UN: if all the camp’s residents had been killed? “We suffered daily for many weeks, under bombardment and then brutal attack, and they do nothing, and now, this wishy-washy report.”

The children of the camp too have their opinions. They throw stones at the Israeli tanks and play on the ruins. Some of them say they will become freedom fighters; others say they want to become lawyers. They have an instinctive feeling that the truth needs power to back it up, and it needs honest defenders: their case is one with the most just cause and the worst of lawyers. They and the women keep close to their destroyed homes, remembering, and hoping that their rights and their history will be honored.

### **Artist and actress speaks with *Voice of Women* Ziad Khaddash**

Palestinian artist Reem Al-Law lives for art. She was trained in music and works in theater and cinema. *Voice of Women* interviewed Reem about art and her career.

*Voice of Women*: Theater is a cultural phenomenon. What relationship do you think Palestinians should have with drama, and what kind of connection is there between oppressed people and the theater?

*Reem Al-Law*: In theater, we enact our hopes and dreams, and express feelings without inhibition. I don’t think Palestinian theater has reached its potential and it hasn’t yet managed to appeal to all sectors of society. It lives the same painful realities that we experience in this historical period. My personal ambition is to write more works that measure the pulse of the current times and also give the audience a sense of hope for better and more beautiful days. Our people want a sense of hope most of all in these times of lack of hope and lack of clarity about the future. In this confusion, the theater has to play its role in searching for new prospects for a different life.

*Voice of Women:* From your participation in international festivals, how do you evaluate our ability to express our cause and make it heard through art?

*Reem Al-Law:* As a persecuted people, we are raised in oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances that force us to analyze ourselves. We have to probe deep into our psychic condition and explore our potential more fully in the direction of making our voice heard more clearly. The world would recognize our rights, but I don't think the tragedy of what has happened to us has reached the world.

*Voice of Women:* What do you say to Israeli artists and the apparent complicity of many of them with the crimes committed by the state of Israel?

*Reem Al-Law:* Silence is not always an expression of depth; it is sometimes an indication of emptiness and vacuum. I cannot imagine an artist who cannot stand up bravely in defense of the poor and the marginalized and the oppressed. I therefore call on more Israeli artists to refuse the occupation and to resist discrimination. Art does not agree with colonies and racism. Art defends freedom, good and respect for others; no Israeli can be an artist and support the occupation.

*Voice of Women:* The Palestinian women entered theatre late. Why, and what are their prospects?

*Reem Al-Law:* Palestinian women got involved in theatre before other Arab women did. Unfortunately, there isn't enough faith in the absolute importance of art for spiritual growth and cultural and social development. Work in art is difficult and challenging, and there are many obstacles. In Palestine, one of the difficulties is the absence of a government to provide security and support. Many are occupied with basic elements of survival and so it is difficult to dispel the view that art is inessential now, that there are more pressing concerns for people. In this climate, it is important to keep the argument that total freedom means freedom of speech and gender equity as well, and that women must participate equally in the process of creation and expression on all levels.