

Voice of Women
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After 37 years of struggle: Palestinian history must be rewritten
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Several outspoken women who are leaders within Palestinian society shared their views with us about the role the General Union of Palestinian Women has played over the long years of struggle against occupation.

Dr. Faiha Abdulhadi, WATC's Director General and a member of the Palestinian National Council:

"Women have played a great role during our struggle for independence, but they have been enormously under-appreciated. Our women's great accomplishments must be acknowledged, and for that to happen, history must be rewritten with a woman's perspective. History has been written without reflecting all the roles played by women, as they actually were in reality. Women's roles must be acknowledged and respected."

Rabiha Thiab, Director of the Association of Women for Social Work:

"Women's political committees and unions were established in the late seventies, early eighties. Dozens of women were imprisoned in the early seventies, side by side with their men counterparts. As soon as they were released they initiated the committees, which turned out to play a great role in bringing women together, involving them in the committees, and equipping and supporting them in the struggle against the Israeli occupation. The main aim of the political committees was to establish military groups. The Association of Women for Social Work, for its part, played a major role throughout the 1980s and in particular during the first Intifada, in 1987."

Clemance Mansour, Director General, Woman and Child Media Directorate at the Ministry of Information:

"The struggle of the women's movement has taken different forms: military, political, social and cultural. Before the 1980s, the role of women was almost invisible, but this changed during the 1980s when their work started to have a more public profile. With the creation of the Palestinian Authority in the early 1990s, the women's movement faced enormous challenges and it became clear that many gaps existed. I believe that the General Union of Palestinian Women has made a significant contribution in bridging these gaps."

Firyal Abdulrahman, member in the Secretariat-General of the General Union of Palestinian Women:

"The General Union of Palestinian Women was established in 1965, and since then played a crucial role in supporting women and linking them to women's committees, both in Palestine and in exile. It has always been characterized by its focus on women at the grassroots level, rather than the few elite. Over the long years, the main aim of the General Union was the national and political problem, thus social, human and women's rights and issues were always shifted aside. Now, we have learned how to bring the two issues together to work on political and social levels at the same time, struggling against occupation and calling for women's rights, respectively."

Um Qusay, Director of the Woman and Child Department at the National Steering Commissariat:

"Despite all the losses we have suffered we must never lose hope. Instead we must insist on our rights and pursue our goals, to win all that we have lost in the past. The Palestinian woman has proven to be capable of occupying different posts on all levels, in particular after the Palestinian Authority was established. Women became ministers, parliament members, directors within ministries and governmental institutions, obtaining high-ranking positions in schools, universities and hospitals. At the same time women played a great domestic role, rearing their children side by side with their roles in the public sphere."

**The Palestinian Labor Law is more progressive than Jordanian law:
But work remains to be done
Rula Muheisen, Ramallah**

The Palestinian Labor Law is considered to be the first law officially approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council. It was published in the PA's official magazine "Al-Waqai' Al-Filasteeniyyeh" on 25 November, 2001. The approval of this law implies a transition from the Egyptian, Jordanian and Israeli civil and military laws which have been in operation over the past decades in occupied Palestine. One of the most significant aspects of the new law is that it treats men and women as equal, despite the fact that women comprise only 12% of the labor force in Palestine. While it is more progressive than Jordanian labor laws in many respects, some issues still remain to be addressed.

Ms. Randa Siniora, Director General of Al-Haq organization, has offered the following analysis of the advantages and the disadvantages of the new law:

Article	Law	Disadvantages	Advantages
Art. 3 Item 2	The law excludes domestic servants, whose cases are to be ruled on by the minister.	This item affects women disproportionately as most domestic servants are women. Also, it is not clear what mechanism the minister will adopt in judging domestic servants' rights.	
Art.6	The Palestinian Labor Law provides a minimum standard that all organizations must abide by, unless the organization's internal policies grant rights to workers that exceed the provisions of the law.		Workers will benefit from whichever standard provides them with the greatest benefits: the law or the organization's policy.
Art. 13	The employer must be committed to hire disabled people as 5% of the institution's overall labor force.	This article doesn't establish a clear mechanism for implementing the law; ie. Determining how to hire	

		disabled people in case of a vacant position.	
Art.39	Terminating the employment of an employee is considered illegal if done for any of the following reasons: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being active in labor unions during work or outside the work place, if the employee has a permission to do so from the employer. 2. If the employee asks to represent his/her colleagues, or is currently representing them, or has previously represented them. 3. If the employee files suit against the employer, claiming the latter's violation of the law. 	This article grants fewer rights to employees, especially women, in comparison with the Jordanian law. Here, marriage hasn't been considered as an illegal reason for firing an employee, thus women become victims of their employers who may terminate their employment if they get married without violating the law.	
Art.42 Item2	If an employee quits his/her job during the first 5 years of work in an organization, he/she is eligible for 1/3 of the final compensations. If the employee quits his/her job during the next 5 years of work in an organization, he/she is eligible for 2/3 of the final compensation. The employee gets the total final compensation if he/she has stayed 10 or more years at the same job.	This law affects women in particular, whose careers tend to be closely related to their marital and pregnancy status. Thus women do not get the same advantages and rates of final compensation as men, whose positions in a certain job tend to last longer than women, due to the latter's domestic obligations. The law also gives the employer the right to fire women before spending 5 years at the same job.	
Art.79	The employee is entitled to 14 days of paid sick leave during one year of work. S/he is entitled to another 14 days of sick leave at half pay, if needed, in the same year.	This article is not sensitive to women's particular health conditions, especially during pregnancy, and the different medical examinations and operations needed, which renders this provision inadequate for women.	
Art.101 Item2	Women must not be asked to work overtime while pregnant and six months after childbirth.	This implies that 7 months after delivery, the employer can demand women to work overtime, without considering women's domestic obligations. This law, indirectly, discourages women from working.	
Art.103	The law grants women 10 weeks of maternity leave.	The maternity leave period for women will only be paid if the pregnant woman has spent at least 180 days working at the organization	This section exceeds the Jordanian Labor Law, which grants women 6 weeks of maternity leave only.

		from which she is taking the maternity leave. Thus, if a woman started working while pregnant, she is not eligible for pay for her maternity leave.	
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Ms. Siniora, believes that despite its positive aspects, which exceed the provisions of the Jordanian Labor Law, the Palestinian Labor Law tends to discourage women from working. It proposes a certain balance between the employer and male employees, disregarding the specific needs of women.

European supporters ashamed of their governments
Widad Al-Barghuthi

During the past year, dozens of Europeans representing NGOs in Europe have visited Palestine, in an effort to demonstrate solidarity, monitor the situation and better understand the Palestinian and Israeli perspectives of the crisis. They report that the media in their respective countries is biased, reflecting only the Israeli perspective and failing to shed light on the Palestinian point of view. Because of this they decided to spend time in Palestine to find out what is really happening here. They had expected that as Europeans Israel would respect them and they would be able to offer protection to people and protest on behalf of the Palestinian nation. They have organized sit-ins, protests, demonstrations and blockade-breaking initiatives in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, to their astonishment, their European identity did not prove to be much of an advantage in the face of Israeli tanks and soldiers, who block the roads not only to Palestinians but to everybody else trying to use them. They have been shot at with tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets. They have been pushed, beaten and thrown on the ground beneath the army boots. An Italian woman activist, Luisa Morgantini was violently shoved to the ground. A French delegation was barred from entering the Gaza Strip. Others have been prohibited from reaching various areas of the West Bank.

Most European group members have stated that they are ashamed of the fact that human rights are barbarically violated while their own governments, along with the Arab and American governments, watch silently. Robert Francis, a French activist, commented that the French people would never be able to survive live the hardships of Palestinian life, under tight closure and daily violation of human rights. He said that the French loose their temper for the slightest reason, such as the bus not coming on time or getting stuck in traffic. What would they do if they were forced to walk through rocky mountain trails for two hours every day, in constant danger, in order to reach work, instead of what used to be a 10-minute drive before the closure?

The efforts made by NGO representatives from Europe are greatly appreciated, but one has to wonder whether their perspectives and experience of real life for Palestinians under occupation will ever produce a change in the positions of their government, or more objective treatment of our issue by the media?

Families of Palestinian political prisoners:
We will continue to protest until we see our loved ones
Ramallah

The General Union of Palestinian Women has organized a sit-in in front of the Red Cross Office in Ramallah, in order for the relatives of Palestinian political prisoners to voice their demands. They are demanding one of their basic rights, namely that of being allowed by Israeli authorities to visit their loved ones behind bars. During the ongoing Intifada, as part of the collective punishment policy Israel is enforcing on the Palestinian nation, Israel prevents anybody from visiting their relatives in Israeli jails. Many women attending the protest have indicated that they haven't seen their sons, fathers, brothers or sisters for months or even years. They are very worried about their health conditions and long desperately to see them. A woman whose husband was arrested 26 years ago -- Ahmad Jbara Abu Al-Sukkar, 65 -- stated that once, after long hours of waiting in front of the prison, all visitors were forced to return home without being allowed to see their loved ones. Even those who manage to obtain visiting permits suffer enormously before being allowed to reach the prison and visit their relatives. The mother of the prisoner Muhammad Al-Qassas says the visiting permits often expire before prison authorities allow the visits to take place. Further, due to the Israeli closure around Palestinian towns and cities, the Red Cross has stopped its usual bus transportation service for visitors going to Israeli jails. The continuous humiliation the visitors and Red Cross members had to undergo at Israeli blockades forced the Red Cross to stop offering transportation, which means that family members are forced to find their own way to the prison, if allowed visits in the first place. This means higher transportation fees and exposure to the danger of attacks by Israeli settlers and harassment by soldiers. It is worth mentioning that for a person to get to the prison and return back home an average of 12 hours is needed, involving danger, stress, and humiliation, with no guarantee of eventually seeing the imprisoned family member.

Women dry fruits and vegetables to save their families from poverty Gaza

Due to the terrible political and economic circumstances, unemployment rates have increased drastically in the past year and a half. The Union of Agricultural Workers is one of many organizations that have been running income-generating projects in an aim to help Palestinians overcome the current crisis. One of its projects, entitled "Drying Agricultural Products with Solar Energy." This project, funded by the UNDP, targeted women in need from southern and central parts of the Gaza Strip. Women from 65 Palestinian families who own agricultural land were trained in how to dry vegetables, fruits and herbs. Women were provided with raw material and machines, and eventually were assisted in marketing the products to interested organizations and merchants. The solar drying system is a good alternative to carbon dioxide-producing procedures. As a result, the women gained an income through selling dried potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini, okra, okra leaves, pepper, dates, grapes and herbs. A further advantage is that these women go on to train other women from their areas on how to dry vegetables and fruits themselves, thus the empowerment of women through this project is not limited only to the women targeted by the project, but expands to their surrounding community.

19 Disabled Palestinians killed by the army during 2001 Amin Abu Wardeh, Nablus

The International Human Rights Organization condemns the brutal and inhumane treatment of Palestinian disabled persons by Israel during 2001. At least 19 disabled Palestinians have been shot dead, injured, beaten or humiliated while walking through Israeli checkpoints, or as a result of gunfire or shelling of civilian areas. Israeli soldiers have killed many of them intentionally, without taking the time to understand their condition, and often left them alone without care. Following are the names of the 19 Palestinians, who suffered from hearing, speech, mobility or mental disabilities:

Name	Age	Area of Living	Details
'Ali Muhammad Abu-Rizeq	11	Gaza Strip	Shot and injured
'Ali Salem Abu Bleemeh	23	Gaza Strip	Shot dead
Muhammad Fadel	13	Gaza Strip	Shot in the thy
'Abdulsalam 'Alayan		Gaza Strip	Shot dead
Nazem Ya'coub Abu Sneineh	25	Hebron, West Bank	Shot in the back
Muhammad Fu'ad Abus'ud	11	Gaza Strip	Shot in the thy
Hussein Al-Atram	32	Gaza Strip	Shell injury
Shadi Kamal Siam	18	Gaza Strip	Shot dead in the heart
Hussein Yousef Abu-Hamdeh	40	Gaza Strip	Shot dead
Ahmad Mustafa	23	Al-Am'ary Refugee Camp, West Bank	Shot in his back, left paralyzed
Mustafa Al-Ramlawi	42	Gaza Strip	Shot dead
Iyad Muhammad Sa'adeh	19	Jenin, West Bank	Injured from Israeli settlers' attack
Mahmud Abu-Hseira	37		Shot dead
Mas'ad Abu-Dahoud	21	Gaza Strip	Shot dead
Tareq Khaled Fashafsheh		West Bank	Shot, critically injured
Na'eem Diab	27	West Bank	Beaten by Israeli soldiers for 2 hours
Sameer Mahmud Abu-Haleeb	30		Shot dead
'Eid Ahmad Wahdan	13		Shot in chest, injured

**Killed by fear
Laila Yousef**

Dalia Ghandour is a two-year-old child who used to live with her mother, father and two brothers in Nablus. For many months they have been living amid constant gunfire, shelling and endless fear, because of the political situation. One day, a car exploded next to their home, killing Ahmad Halaweh. A few days later another youth named Al-Sirawi was killed. Dalia was aware of these incidents despite her young age. She began to cry frequently and her mother was unable to comfort her; she was preoccupied with fear and uncertainty. Before she was able to forget the first incidents, Dalia woke up one night to the loud sound of Israeli tanks shelling outside her home. This was too much for her. She started screaming, then suddenly turned blue and went into convulsions. Her parents took her immediately to the nearby hospital, but all the efforts of the doctors failed to save her life. According to the doctors, Dalia died as the result of a weak heart and the breakdown of her white blood cells. Dalia died as a result of accumulated fear! It is striking how little media coverage her death was given, as if the loss of an innocent life amid the chaos and tremendous suffering going on all around us is too trivial to mention. But her family is left in agony over the loss of their sweet little girl.