

**Voice of Women**  
**Issue no. 124**  
**27 July 2001**

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**Editorial: Trivial Talk!**

The constant accusations that women are not participating in the current political struggle have gone too far. If you look deeply at the issue, you will find that in fact most sectors of Palestinian society are not playing an active role either. Participation has become confined to a small, specific sector of society only.

Women, contrary to the perception that they are passive in the political struggle, are in fact those suffering the most as a result of the political crisis. They are the ones grieving the deaths, injuries and imprisonment of their husbands, sons, daughters and brothers. They are the ones left behind to struggle to find bread to feed their hungry children and to protect themselves from unfair social traditions and unjust laws. But the most serious issue at hand is the fact that thousands of Palestinian youth have become paralyzed and disabled as a result of being shot by Israeli military forces. Thousands of living bodies now lay motionless, unable to perform even natural functions. Women, mothers and wives are the ones who face the task of coping with this reality and caring for their beloved ones, putting their own interests and lives aside and dedicating their time to their disabled relatives, sharing their pain and grief.

Downplaying the role of women, therefore, is a trivial pursuit and negates the hidden role of women, the suffering they are undergoing. It dismisses not only half of our society, namely women, but also the handicapped themselves. It would be a far more sensible pursuit to discuss seriously the issue of the disabled, rather than talking nonsense and pointing fingers of false accusations at the women who are proving themselves heroes.

**The Palestinian women who rebuild human beings**  
**Ahlam Hammad, Gaza**

'Alya Abu-'Omran is a woman in her thirties and mother of three beautiful children. Her eldest child, Samir, is in first grade. She was living a normal and content life, grateful for what she had, when Israel's occupation and deadly bullets changed her life forever. Her eldest son was shot in the back as he walked past Kfar Darom settlement in the Gaza Strip. He is now totally paralyzed, and can only lay motionless on his bed. 'Alya's life has changed completely. Apart from the grief and pain she feels because of her son's condition and the knowledge that he will never be able to move again, she bears all the burdens of bathing and feeding him and caring for all his needs. As a mother, she would like to give her time and energy to all of her children, but Samir requires so much of her time that it prevents her from doing activities with her other children. Their financial situation is deteriorating with every passing day, and in addition they face the costs of medication and rehabilitation. Her husband has been unemployed since the beginning of the Intifada. In the past, 'Alya assisted her husband financially by selling embroidery and sewing clothes. But there is no way she can find time to do this now.

A similar tragedy happened to Hamada Hasanein. He was shot in the leg with an 80mm bullet, resulting in amputation. He used to work as a taxi driver, but is no longer able to. His wife is eight months pregnant with their first child. They are suffering greatly, with no one to help them.

In Sa'di Faraj case, he was shot in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet and lost his sight. He was engaged and was about to get married, but had to cancel all his plans after the loss of his sight.

As long as the Israeli occupation continues, there will be no end to such tragedies and to the suffering of Palestinian people. The numbers of handicapped and disabled people are increasing every day and serious efforts are required to address their needs.

**Live ammunition and miscarriages:  
most of those injured in Al-Nabi Saleh village are women  
Widad Al-Barghuthi, Ramallah**

Last Saturday, during the middle of the night, hundreds of Israeli soldiers with tanks and bulldozers invaded the village of Al-Nabi Saleh, north-west of Ramallah, attacking its villagers, shooting teargas and live ammunition, terrorizing children and occupying homes. All the villagers -- men, women and children -- left their warm beds to defend their village with their bare hands, standing together as neighbors to give each other courage. The brutal Israeli occupation forces do not restrain themselves from attacking innocent, unarmed people trying to defend their crops, houses and children from assault. When the villagers arrived together at one of the invaded homes, belonging to Abdul-Karim Al-Tamimi, the Israeli forces prevented them from continuing and also from returning, and tried to force the women into the occupied house while leaving men outdoors. Many people were injured and choked by the teargas, most of them women. One woman, Ra'ida Hussein Al-Tamimi, was shot in her thigh and stomach. Others were pushed to the ground and stamped on with army boots, without no sense of respect or dignity. Another woman, in her third month of pregnancy, Rahmeh Sami, suffered a

miscarriage after being exposed to teargas. Israeli forces continue to occupy the home until today, terrorizing its inhabitants and threatening the safety of all the villagers. They soldiers harass villagers as they pass by no sense of remorse or humanity. Is this the ceasefire everybody is talking about? Isn't it unfair to accuse Palestinians of breaking the ceasefire while Israelis are breaking it every second in every Palestinian village and town?

**Palestinian weddings: silent and shy**  
**Azizeh Noufal, Nablus**

"They've stolen our happiness. For so many years I have been waiting for this moment, to marry off my son with a huge wedding and lots of guests, to create wonderful memories. They have deprived us of every beautiful thing in our lives," said Abu-Haitham from Tal Village.

When summer approaches every year, one can almost smell the happiness in the air. The music coming from the wedding halls vibrates in the air, brides and grooms take pictures in the parks standing hand-in-hand and brimming with joy. This summer, however, what you smell in the air is teargas. This is a summer of silence and mourning. Instead of planning the normal details of the wedding, one must consider whether the guests, the bride or the family will be able to travel to the groom's village or pass the Israeli blockades. Instead of being overwhelmed with pride and confidence, one is overcome with insecurity and the images of death. How could you one plan a wedding party with people being killed everyday, blood being shed every moment? Many weddings have been cancelled due to a relative being killed, a neighbor injured, or a house demolished. How can anyone plan for tomorrow under these circumstances?

**A hundred homes destroyed: life in Rafah after demolition**  
**Munir Abu-Ras, Gaza**

Since the beginning of the Intifada, a hundred homes in Rafah have been completely demolished, dozens of homes have been partially damaged and two hundred have been hit by bullets and shrapnel. The families of Mahumd Al-Dabbas and Muhammad Al-Dabbagh told us about their pain, suffering and loss since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2001. At three a.m. that morning, loudspeakers that shook the windows awakened the entire neighborhood. Israeli occupying forces were invading the neighborhood, demanding the inhabitants to leave their homes immediately or they would be buried under the wreckage. Amid screams of young innocent children, unable to comprehend the situation, men and women tried their utmost to protect their children from death. People ran in every direction screaming, shouting, crying, not knowing were to go or what to do. After a few seconds the Israeli tanks and bulldozers started leveling the area, demolishing one home after the other before the eyes of their owners, who had saved all their lives to own

these homes after being made refugees in 1948. Now they have lost everything once again, and are left to live in tents along with hundreds of neighbors near the destroyed home which they had waited so many years to build. "They destroyed our lives, left us homeless, turned our lives into hell. What did we do to them? What has this child done to them?" exclaimed Um-Khalil Al-Dabbas pointing to Amal Al-Dabbas, a nine-year-old girl sitting in shock, unable to believe that she will have to live her life in a tent, and that she has lost her home forever.

### **Women Evaluate the Intifada: Decision-Makers are Neglecting Most Sectors Maha 'Abbad, Bethlehem**

Women have been active participants throughout the long years of struggle against Israeli occupation. The following women activists had the following to say in this regard:

Khawla Salem commented that women are not the only sector absent from the spotlight during this Intifada. This, she believes, is the fault of decision-makers who have created a militarized Intifada which marginalizes large sectors. However, women have participated in non-military activities and events within women's committees and political parties, such as organizing and participating in demonstrations, defying Israeli soldiers at blockades and boycotting Israeli products. She insisted on the importance of representation by women in national and Islamic committees, parties and forces.

Nadia Harb compared the role of women in the first Intifada with their role in the current Intifada, describing their role in the first Intifada as development-oriented, supporting home economy and small projects for women and visiting the families of the injured, imprisoned and martyred. This Intifada, in contrast, is vocation-oriented, focusing on visiting the injured, the families of martyrs and those whose homes have been demolished or shelled. Women have carried out this role through their committees and parties.

Muna Jubran, a counselor in the General Union of Palestinian Trade Unions, discussed the role of women during this Intifada, which she believes has focused on agriculture, home economy and psychological wellbeing of children. She also believes that women have been active in assisting ill people, helping poor university students to pay their tuition fees, and organizing special medical days to provide people, especially the unemployed, with free medical treatment. She believes that the most crucial matter currently is the need to find job opportunities for the unemployed.

### **After seven years of devotion to the women's cause: Ms. Suheir Azzouni bids farewell to the Women's Affairs Technical Committee**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2001, the Women's Affairs Technical Committee's Executive Committee held a farewell reception for Ms. Suheir Azzouni, General Director, in honor of and gratitude to her for her achievements. Speeches were given by members of the executive committee and the staff, by Yousef Al-Qazaz, and by Ms. Azzouni herself.

All speakers expressed respect for Ms. Azzouni, thanking her for her devotion to women's cause over the past seven years. They mentioned her sincerity and also her light-heartedness, her strength and sense of humor. They expressed their appreciation of her achievements and regret to bid her farewell, and expressed their desire for her to continue to play a role as a guide, reference and supporter in women's and political matters.

Ms. Azzouni expressed her thoughts and emotions regarding the Women's Affairs Technical Committee and her work over the years. She said that she considers the organization like her own child, whom she has raised with all care and devotion. She expressed her best wishes for the future of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee and promised to continue to be available to provide assistance.

### **Is driving a car more responsibility than raising a family?**

The age of eighteen is internationally considered the age of maturity and adulthood, after which a person can obtain a driving license, open a bank account, vote in elections and engage in business and so forth.

Locally, this concept sometimes seems to be forgotten on the pretext that in the absence of Palestinian law Jordanian and Egyptian laws are applied instead. Many girls are married under the age of eighteen and sometimes even at the age of fifteen. Is the driving of a car more dangerous than carrying responsibility for a family and children?

An 18-year-old girl, the wife of a martyr, got married when she was seventeen. After her husband's death, her father-in-law convinced her to give him full power-of-attorney over her rights, without her really understanding what this implies. When she was only seventeen she was able to open a bank account to save her money and her husband's income for the future. However her father-in-law convinced her to give him unlimited authority over her account, which allowed him to withdraw all the money she owned. He also took her to the Organization of Martyrs' Families and had her sign over all her rights to him in regards to compensations she receives as the wife of a martyr. She was informed by the organization of the implications of doing this, but, still in shock from her husband's death and wishing to maintain a strong connection with his family, she gave up her rights without realizing the intentions of her father-in-law.

Many official parties were told about this incident, including religious leaders, who explained the importance of reaching the age of eighteen before being eligible to participate in legal transactions. They also stressed the importance of regaining the rights afforded her by the law and by religion.