

**Feminist institutions demand legislation  
to protect battered women and prosecute assailants**

Feminist institutions are demanding both legislative and executive authorities to endorse laws to protect girls and women from violence and to prosecute the perpetrators of violence. These institutions are calling for responsible parties such as the police, public prosecution and judiciary authorities to take serious and immediate action to bring those guilty of physical and sexual abuse to justice.

The institutions also warn the community of the danger of increasing sexual harassment, rape and incest against female and male children. They point out the heavy consequences of such assaults in the Palestinian society since in many cases the victim of the attack, especially if it she is a female, may be killed.

This initiative was prompted by the increase in sexual harassment, incest crimes, and the murder of the victim afterwards in the society. Human rights activists and institutions, police and a number of parliamentarians met several times to study the methods that should be employed to eliminate violence against women.

Maha Abu Dayyah, director of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, reports that female victims are often ostracized and humiliated, sometimes expelled from their families and placed in shelters for a short while. If they escape from these shelters they are vulnerable to becoming the victims of political and social exploitation.

Abu Dayah believes that the best way to protect a victim is for the family to embrace her and surround her with the love and security she deserves and needs. Additionally, she points out the responsibility that the Legislative Council carries to draft laws that bring the perpetrators to justice. In addition, existing laws must be amended and enforced to ensure that this problem is addressed adequately.

She also explained that the alarming increase in the number of sexual attacks is linked to the strangling political situation and closures imposed on the Palestinian society, as well as severely overcrowded living spaces.

Furthermore, Abu Dayah indicates that the results of a survey carried out by her center indicated that the number of male children exposed to sexual harassment is higher than the number of female victims.

Lieutenant colonel Abu Rabi stated that there have been 31 officially registered cases of violent attacks against women one of which was a murder that occurred in Ramallah in 2001. Eight cases of violent attacks against women and one case of murder were reported in barely over one month during this year, from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003 until February 12, 2003, representing over 50% of the total number of cases for the year.

