

**The Voice of Women**  
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**Editorial: The struggle for independence must continue!**

We light candles for all those sacrificing themselves for Palestine, for the martyrs, the injured, the prisoners, the disabled. For all those who believe in our cause, we light a candle of hope, wishing to see peace prevail and security and safety fill all aspects of the Palestinian life.

We wish to see an independent Palestinian state established, in which all Palestinians, men and women, are equal citizens under the rule of law. We call upon all social sectors, including Palestinian civil society, to be active participants in forming a better tomorrow, to take part in the decision-making process and participate in the struggle for independence in all spheres of life. Everybody has a right to participate of the state-building process!

**Palestinian women take their families into the 1948 borders to survive**  
**Abdul Sattar Shreedah, Jenin**

As a result of increasing unemployment rates due to the political circumstances, many families have been classified as falling below the poverty line. They are struggling to find enough to eat. One day, Um Muhammad, from Al-Yamun Village was forced, with her three sons, to spend the night without dinner. Recently, the phenomenon of spending the summer in villages within the borders of 1948 Palestine, doing agricultural work and harvesting the year's products, has been growing. Many Palestinian families find this alternative provides a solution for them, although they are taking a great risk because entering the 1948 borders without Israeli permission means breaking the Israeli law. However, hunger and poverty are powerful forces; compared to seeing one's own children starve to death, the risk of being an "illegal" worker within Israel seems trivial.

What is striking about this phenomenon is the shift in social norms which it represents, with women themselves taking the initiative and moving their entire family, including their children, to one of the villages within the 1948 borders, to work in the fields to earn their living. This type of struggle is waged by women, and supported by their husbands, for the wellbeing of their families.

The advantages of this phenomenon is that it is enhancing the economic status of Palestinian families as well as challenging traditions and customs, including negative perceptions of women's roles. In this way it is supporting the principle of equality between men and women, and by breaking norms is creating room for new perceptions to be established, with an idea of women as survivors who struggle and are capable of protecting their families replacing traditional views which marginalize and isolate women workers.

Some of the disadvantages, however, are as follows:

- Employers do not supply workers with suitable living conditions. They are normally given Bedouin tents to live in for a period of at least two months, or in the best cases caravans and small huts.
- This results in a number of negative social outcomes, especially regarding the interactions among children of different families. Many of the children are teenagers, and relationships between them can get out of control resulting in families get into feuds which undermine their purpose for being there.
- As a result of this kind of living, sickness spreads quickly, interrupting work. While employers are sympathetic in many cases, sick workers often have to pay for the lost days. Some employers cut the wages of workers' relatives to make up for the loss.
- Due to the workers' "illegal" presence within the borders of 1948, they have no protection for their rights as workers. Demanding one's rights could result in the employer notifying Israeli authorities and the arrest of the "illegal" workers.

**Fadwa Tuqan: I wish I could turn the world upside down**  
**Islam 'Ibadi, Palestinian Women Journalists Office, Nablus**

Following are some selections from an interview with one of Palestine's greatest and eldest women poets, Fadwa Tuqan.

***How do you perceive yourself during the current Intifada?***

I am following all the events and activities taking place, but my deteriorating health prevents me from being an active participant. In my latest collection of poems I have written about the dreams of the impossible peace with Israel.

***What have you written recently during the Intifada?***

I haven't produced anything new. My last collection is entitled *The Last Melody*, It's a selection of poems illustrating my emotions and feelings at this phase of my life, which I consider to be my last phase. I am not writing anymore because I am afraid of the future. This uncertainty hinders me from writing.

***How do you perceive the current Intifada? Is it positive or negative?***

I think it is very important to continue the struggle, thus continue the Intifada. In order to do that, we as Palestinians must be united to achieve our goals.

***Is your poetry stylistically similar from one poem to the other, or does it change with the idiosyncrasies of each occasion, rebellion or war?***

Each poem has its uniqueness, because special figures, areas and a period of time characterize every event. However, the fact that all poems regard "the other" as the enemy who is depriving a nation of its right, gives the poems a sense of continuity, as long as occupation and oppression still exist.

***How do poets and authors fight for the same cause?***

I believe that a poet and an author are equally important in the struggle for independence, side by side with the fighters on the ground. Our poems and literary texts inspire the fighters and encourage them to continue their struggle for a better future.

***In the context of the Israeli policies of assassinations and tight closure, where do poets or authors get the inspiration to write?***

When I sit and watch TV, seeing the horrible images of destruction, death and injury, I cannot but wish to be able to turn this world upside down and empty it of all its evils. This inspired me to write a poem entitled *This Earth*.

***Has the fact that you have never had children ever had an impact on your poetry about Palestinian children and children generally?***

Being childless hasn't deprived me of the strong emotions and love I feel towards children. They are crucial figures in my life. I respect the Palestinian children in particular, for their courageous, determined and challenging nature. They are little heroes who manage to convey the Palestinian perspective to the world through their living stones.

**September: Month of massacres uncounted but not forgotten  
Bodies of martyrs in Sabra and Shatilla dragged on the roads  
Widad Al-Barghuthi**

Already 17 years have passed since the massacres of Sabra and Shatilla took place. It still feels as if it was yesterday. What has happened since? Many more brutalities and crimes have been committed by various Israeli Prime Ministers, the most notorious being Ariel Sharon.

On the night of 16 September 1982, Israeli forces and Phalangists entered the two refugee camps, their faces covered with masks, carrying a large quantity of weapons, machine guns and knives. They began to terrorize, slaughter and mutilate men, women and children without restraint. Hundreds of Palestinians were brutally killed, and tens of thousands injured and disabled.

Following is a testimony by Maher Al-'Alami, a survivor of the massacre:

"I saw dozens of bodies scattered in front of the nearby shelter, next to my home. I thought they were killed by the bombing which had started once Basheer Al-Jumayyel was killed. Then I saw that the bodies were all tied up with rope. We stayed in the house. My family consisted of twelve members. Our neighbor was also staying with us, afraid of being alone. They came and banged loudly on our door. We opened it, and they started to swear at all of us. They asked my father to get his identity card. Once he turned his back to get it, he was shot dead. They began shooting at all the family members with their heavy machine guns. Laila, our neighbor, was pregnant. They tore up her belly, and killed her. I managed to hide in the bathroom with my younger brother Ismail. They stole all the money we had except for 20,000 Lira which my sister Nihad has hidden in her blouse. My mother and my other sisters were still alive; they had pretended to be dead. My little two-year-old sister climbed out of Nihad's arms and ran to her mother to hide, but they didn't spare her, they shot her directly in the head. My father and five siblings were killed. We ran out quickly to call an ambulance, but each of us went in a different direction and lost track of each other."

This is only one of thousands of tragedies that have happened over the years. Israel is responsible for the loss of so many Palestinian lives, yet is still committing horrible crimes -- crimes against humanity which no one brings to an end.

**Palestinian woman wins international prize for English poetry**  
**Amin Abu-Wardeh, Al-Najah Lis-Sahafah, Nablus**

Suheir Shbeita of Nablus, 27 years old, has won an international prize in an English Poetry Competition. She is the first Palestinian ever to win this prize. She sent her poem, which deals with social change, to a well-reputed website which was hosting this competition. A few weeks later she was told that she had been nominated along with 32 other participants from all over the world. All selected poems will be published.

Suheir is married to a Palestinian journalist and has two children. She has a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and has written many poems in both Arabic and English. She intends to publish her first collection in English soon. She encourages all those who are capable of writing in a foreign language to do so, as a way of communicating Palestinian perspectives and ideas to the world.

**Women of the Future: Empowering women via internet centers**  
**Waddah Abdulsalam**

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee, in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, has launched a project entitled "Women of the Future - Empowering Women Via Internet Centers". It aims at initiating five computer centers in five different isolated cities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, to be managed by various women's committees selected by the project. The five cities in which the centers have been established are: Qalqilia, Salfet, Herbon, Gaza and Khan Younis. The women's committees are as follows:

1. Association of Women's Committees for Social Work.
2. Union of Palestinian Women's Committees.
3. Palestinian Working Women Society for Development.
4. Palestinian Federation of Women's Action.

The project aims at:

- Strengthening and empowering women, teaching them how to use modern technology to obtain information
- Enhancing women's communication skills and contact with the world, to reduce their isolation and ignorance of things beyond their own lives
- Increasing women's opportunities in finding jobs

Two centers have already been opened: one in Gaza and the other in Salfeet. Following are the e-mail addresses for each center's respective women's committee:

1. Hebron & Salfeet - Association of Women's Committees for Social Work: [wof\\_awcsw@salefeet.org](mailto:wof_awcsw@salefeet.org)
2. Qalqilia - Union of Palestinian Women's Committees: [wof\\_upwa@hally.net](mailto:wof_upwa@hally.net)
3. Khan Younis - Palestinian Federation of Women's Action: [wof\\_pfw@alhoda.net](mailto:wof_pfw@alhoda.net)
4. Gaza - Palestinian Working Women Society for Development: [wof\\_pwwsd@palnet.com](mailto:wof_pwwsd@palnet.com)

### **Tubas' Charitable Society reactivated by women Meisa' Abu-Dawwas, Palestinian Women Journalist Office, Jenin**

Tubas' Charitable Society has been reactivated after a long period of inactivity due to economic shortages and large debts. A number of women from the town volunteered to activate the Society once again, hoping to bring it back to the level of activity it had when it was established in 1969. They believe in its importance for women, children and society generally. A seven-member Executive Committee was elected to undertake the work of restoring the Society. While the Society originally had a nursery for children, it lacked necessary equipment and supplies, such as books or toys. The women equipped the Society with clean toilet facilities, toys and books. A theatre for children was established too. Today, several training courses for women are conducted on the following topics:

- Women's health
- First Aid
- Computer Skills
- Sewing
- Glass Art
- Cosmetics
- Nutrition

Many parties played a role in saving the Society. Palestinian National Authority Chairman, Yasser Arafat, donated US \$ 5000. Ma'an Center, Save the Children Organization and the Palestinian Medical Relief Services have all offered their generous support, either through conducting training courses for women, or providing material for children.

