

**Voice of Women  
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**The occupation is the real face of hatred  
Widad Al-Barghuthi**

Wafa' Idrees, the first Palestinian woman to detonate herself with explosives, leaves behind feelings of grief and sorrow at the loss of a young woman, but also countless explanations as to the motives behind her act.

Over the past weeks, the Israeli newspapers have been obsessed with Wafa' Idrees, describing her as a terrorist and as the face of hatred, claiming that there could never be any justification for a 'suicide' attack against innocent people. However, this characterization of Wafa' fails to take into account her background as a refugee and her experience as a volunteer with the Red Crescent Society, where she treated those injured by Israeli bullets and gunfire and had to witness tremendous pain and suffering. The Israeli media overlooks the real reasons Wafa' was driven to commit such an act. They ignore the fact that the Palestinian nation has been brutalized on a daily basis, its people killed, its homes destroyed and its land confiscated and handed over to Jewish settlers from all parts of the world – settlers who have come to participate in the Israeli government's occupation of Palestine which has made tens of thousands of Palestinians permanent refugees. How can anyone ignore Wafa's background and fail to see that the real face of terror is Israel's racist and barbaric occupation of the Palestinian land and people?

**Palestinian women share in the smoke and fire until the occupation ends  
*Voice of Women, Ramallah***

Um Hatem and 'Aisha Dahoud, and among the many elderly Palestinian women who participate regularly in national activities and demonstrations in Ramallah. They consider their participation to be a national and moral duty.

Their participation, however, subjects them to great dangers. Israeli gunfire targets anybody opposing occupation and injustice. These women report that they have

witnessed several occasions in which young men were killed or injured right next to them. But they insist on continuing to be there for the demonstrators, to support, encourage them, and to gather stones for them -- their only weapon in the face of Israeli tanks and bullets. 'Aisha Dahoud reports that, "Despite the great dangers and the high risk of being shot, we will not stop until the Israeli occupation is terminated. There is a high risk of getting shot, but we cannot sit at home knowing that our men are being injured and killed. Our participation is the least we can do."

***Women of the Future: Palestinian women go online***  
**Samar Al-Dareemly, Al-Majd Journalist Office, Gaza**

The *Women of the Future* project has proven to be an enormously successful initiative, widening the scope of women's lives and educating them about the advancing technological world. Through its five computer and internet centers distributed throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, this project has allowed many women, regardless of their political or religious affiliations and their academic or social backgrounds to benefit from the expanding opportunities. Women are welcome to use the computers in the centers on a daily basis, develop their knowledge via internet accessibility, communicate with their relatives locally or abroad, type and print any documents they need, as well as participate in the training courses that are offered. Course topics include: internet, basic computer skills, e-mail, web page design, and internet cultural forums, among others.

Hiba Muhammad, a volunteer with the Palestinian Working Woman's Society for Development and a frequent visitor to the Gaza Center, comments, "The *Women of the Future* project is unique in the services it provides to women."

Raghda Al-Shawa, one of the supervisors of the project in Gaza, states, "At the center, we share a feeling of being one cooperative family. We all respect and love each other."

'Abeer Ahmad, a 30-year-old married woman, is one of the beneficiaries of the project. She participated in a basic computer skills course at the Gaza center and says she that it has expanded her knowledge noticeably. She is anxious to be able to use the computer at home without relying on anybody's help. She is also planning to take a course on internet skills.

***Women studying at An-Najah face difficult choices as they approach graduation***  
**Lubna Al-Ashqar, Palestinian Women Journalists Office, Nablus**

The second semester has begun at An-Najah University in Nablus, bringing with it renewed financial concerns for many women students. Some of these students have only one or two semesters left before graduation, but are finding it extremely difficult to pay their tuition fees at this time when the economic situation of most Palestinian families is becoming critical as a result of the ongoing political crisis.

Khitam, Rana, Fatina, Najwan are all seniors who have either dropped out because they are unable to pay their tuition fees -- sometimes in order to enable a sibling to remain enrolled, -- or have decreased the number of credit hours they are taking, to reduce their tuition fees. Other have taken out taken loans, despite the difficult conditions, in order to be able to graduate.

An-Najah University is taking its students' economic conditions into consideration and has exempted 3500 students from paying tuition fees, each student according to his/her background. These students include relatives of martyrs killed by Israeli military forces and those who have other siblings studying at university level in Palestine.

**In the rain and cold of a refugee camp**  
**Amin Abu Wardeh, Nablus**

Um Suleiman, a Palestinian woman in her seventies, lives in Balata refugee camp, to the east of Nablus. For years she has visited the nearby UNRWA health center due to her chronic physical complaints which she has suffered since 1948 when she, along with thousands of other Palestinians, were forced to become permanent refugees, living in homes of bricks and scrap metal. Um Suleiman returns home after her medical visit, picking her way through the narrow streets of the camp, to take shelter from the pouring rain in her flimsy home. She sits beside an old heater, burning some scraps of wood she gathered the day before to create some kind of warmth. After the fire dies out she continues to sit there, reliving her past. The many images of her long life and the life she had before becoming a refugee, pass through her mind, leaving behind her long and burning desire to be buried in the land of her forefathers, the place from which she was expelled in 1948.

**Wife of martyr 'Omar Wahdan: Our unborn child will never see its father**  
***Voice of Women, Ramallah***

'Omar Wahdan, 19, who was married just five months ago to Iman Saleh, 16, was shot dead on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2002, in the Al-Tireh area of Ramallah, during clashes with the Israeli tanks which have invaded the area again. He was a member of the Palestinian Intelligence Special Forces, and lived in Qalandia refugee camp.

His father, Abu 'Abdallah, 46, says of his son, "'Omar was helpful and kind, he always had a smile on his face."

His wife, Iman, who is two months pregnant, says with tears in her eyes, "We were deeply in love. We married as a result of our love relationship, and were incredibly happy during the short period our marriage. When he found out I was pregnant, he was overwhelmed with happiness. He couldn't wait for the baby to arrive. He loved everyone, especially the disabled children in the refugee camp, who he always helped and supported. 'Omar's friend told me that 'Omar had mentioned that in the event he was killed, he would like our child to be named Muhammad if it is a boy and

Filasteen if it is a girl. I couldn't believe it when I heard the shocking news. He is dead."

'Omar's mother adds, "People are still coming to visit to congratulate us for his wedding...his wife is pregnant...what shall I tell this child when he or she grows up. Should I tell him or her that 'Omar was killed by Israeli soldiers? This child will grow up without a father: how will he not feel the desire to avenge his father's death? The Israelis have filled our hearts with grief. "

### **Wafa' Idrees: First Palestinian woman to blow herself up Mariam Abu 'Ein**

Wafa' Idrees was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1971, and grew up in Ramallah and Jerusalem. She had three siblings with whom she lived along with her parents. Her father died when she was nine years of age. She married her cousin, but their marriage ended after nine years in divorce. She took refuge in her mother's small home where she lived until her death. She loved children enormously, but was unable to be a mother due to complications she experienced in the final stage of pregnancy.

Wafa' family originates from Al-Ramleh, from where they were expelled in 1948. She grew up as a refugee living in Al-Am'ary, lacking such basic necessities as privacy, warmth, good hygiene and freedom. She had always believed that in such a world, there is nothing to lose.

Wafa' worked as a volunteer at the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, which exposed her to the many forms of suffering the Palestinian nation has undergone for the past year and a half as a result of the ongoing Israeli aggression. She has seen young people injured, bullets tearing apart their stomachs, brains and faces. She would tell her mother about the horrible experiences she had undergone during her work and the bloody images that remained with her.

Nobody expected that Wafa' would commit such an act. Dr. Husam Sharqawi, representative for the Red Crescent Society, affirmed this and added that volunteers providing first aid to the injured are instructed to treat every human the same way, regardless of his or her origin, ethnicity or color. "We cannot believe that the Wafa' we knew could have committed such an act!"