

**Voice of Women**  
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**23 September 1999**

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**What will be the fate of the thousand signatures?**

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) published in its bi-weekly newspaper supplement, issued on 25 September 1997, a petition demanding the Palestinian Ministry of the Interior to give Palestinian women the right to issue passports for their children without the approval of their husband, father or brother. At the time, some 10,000 signatures were collected, confirming that there is a sense of clear discrimination against women in this regard.

The international conventions and laws consider citizens worldwide equal in their rights regardless of nationality, race, sex or color or religion.

Once again, we call upon the Ministry of the Interior to grant Palestinian women their right to obtain passports for their children without the approval of their father or any other authority figure given the fact that the mother of a child also has authority over them. We call on the ministry to respond to this issue, particularly as the WATC has received a number of complaints from women who have been affected by this policy.

**In This Issue:**

- 50,000 signatures have been gathered to demand that the killing of women on the pretext of defending family honor be addressed
- Violence against women is increasing
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### **Study on Palestinian women and elections**

Despite the fact that a number of Palestinian women ran for the elections of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) which took place on 20 January 1996, their level of representation in decision-making and political positions is still very limited considering their sacrifice and contribution over the past thirty years.

Dr. Nader Izzat, the Director of the Development Studies Program conducted an analytical study entitled 'Palestinian Women and Elections' to highlight the importance of women's participation in the elections and the importance of women reaching decision-making and political positions.

The study discusses various aspects of women's participation in decision-making positions in general and in the PLC elections in particular. It also provides analysis of the legislative elections from a theoretical and practical viewpoint based on scientific data.

The study deals with the role of women's institutions in the PLC and their efforts to support and activate the role of women in the voting process. It also touches on the social and political background of women who ran for the PLC elections and their positions toward a number of issues, such as the electoral system, quota, the child and women's committee, and the women's block.

It is noteworthy to mention that 27 Palestinian women ran for the PLC elections as opposed to 646 men. The late Samiha Khalil ran for the presidency, setting a precedent in the history of the Arab world, and obtained between 7 and 10% of the total number of votes. Five women won seats in the elections: Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Dalal Salameh, Intisar Al-Wazir (Um Jihad), Rawia As-Shawa, and Jamilah Seidam.

### **Preparations for the Fourth International Conference continue**

The Gaza Community Mental Health Program is preparing for its fourth international conference, entitled 'Women in Palestine,' which will be held in November 1999 in Gaza with the participation of more than 220 public figures from Palestine and throughout the Arab world, as well as researchers from European and American universities.

Research studies will be presented at the conference in issues related to women, gender, human development, health, education and environment. It will also feature an exhibition displaying the products of Palestinian women's institutions, such as embroidery, drawings and handcrafts, in addition to screening films related to women.

**Book review: *The Image of Women in the Arab Novel*  
Walid As-Shurafa**

The study presents samples of Arab literature from the early twentieth century and the negative view of the greater part of novelists toward women in their portrayal of women as a means of pleasure and enjoyment and their failure to deal with the problems and concerns of women in depth. The study reveals that a lack of awareness among Arab writers concerning the rights of women was the main factor contributing to this negative portrayal of women. The study also includes samples of writers who have portrayed women in a positive manner.

**50,000 Signatures gathered:  
Confronting the killing of women on the pretext of defending family honor  
Ruqia Al-Alami, Jordan**

A national campaign under the slogan ‘Stop Killing the Innocents’ was launched in Jordan for the elimination of the phenomenon of killing women on the pretext of defending family honor.

The campaign was launched in early September 1999 and was sponsored by governmental and non-governmental organizations and youth groups in order to collect 50,000 signatures to be submitted to the Jordanian Parliament to approve the abolishment of article no. 340 of the Criminal Law, according to which men are given the license to kill women without reason, constituting a grave violation of Islam, human rights and the articles of the Jordanian Constitution.

Aimed at raising public awareness concerning the dangers of this phenomenon, the campaign revealed that most of the victims were virgins according to the reports of the medical examiner and the records of the courts and the directorate of public security. A study on ‘honor killing’ revealed that most women who have been killed on the pretext of defending the honor killing proved to be innocent after their bodies were examined by the medical examiner. Statistics have shown that 20 out of 30 women were virgins when killed under the pretext of defending the family honor.

\*The following chart shows the number of women who have been killed during the years between 1994 and 1999. Eighty-four women were killed in the name of ‘honor killing,’ five of whom were listed under the column of unknown women, ranging from 15 to 39 years of age. One of the victims was 60 years old. The deaths occurred during these years as follows:

Year	Number of Victims
94	12
95	16
96	16
97	20
98	11
99	7

**Special interview with novelist Sahar Khalifeh**

## **Widad Barghouti**

Sahar was born in Nablus to parents who had hoped for a boy to carry the family's name and to inherit her father's properties. Her unhappy marriage of thirteen years ended in divorce. She started writing regularly following the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories in the 1967 war. Sahar produced her first novel, which was published by Al-Ma'aref Publishing House, after the 1967 war. She enrolled in the English Department at Birzeit University when she was 32 years old, but withdrew for two semesters, during which she produced her novel *As-Sabbar*. The novel recorded the highest volume of sales in the Jordanian and Palestinian markets and then in the Arab world according to a report issued by the Royal Scientific Society at the time. It was published by various publishing houses in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. In the novel, Sahar attempted to record testimonies of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation. She later wrote the novels *Abbad As-Shams*, *Bab As-Saha*, and *Al-Mirath*.

### **Addressing the concerns of families and society In'am Abed Al-Hadi, Women & Family Affairs Center**

The article sheds light on the importance of amending the Personal Status Law, preventing polygamy, and restricting the right of men to divorce, with the aim of establishing a healthy and constructive society devoid of social and psychological problems.

The article concludes with the following recommendations:

- \*Enact a law to promote equality for women
- \*Evaluate the number of hours the wife spends in cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the children and evaluate this work monetarily
- \*Limit the difference in age between the individuals entering a marriage to reduce psychological control of one by the other
- \*Give equal access to the family's income and assets to both partners

### **Moni Sewing Factory achieves success in less than a year Itaf Yousef**

Moni Sewing Factory in Betunia, near Ramallah, was set up a year ago by Ms. Huda Musalam. She was born in Lebanon and studied business administration and economics at the American University in Lebanon. She then obtained a diploma in computers and another one in design from Ozmot, a French school for sewing and design. Ms. Musalam worked with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for 20 years in Lebanon and Tunisia. She was one of the activists at the Palestinian Planning Center and also in the General Union of Palestinian Women.

Throughout the interview, Ms. Musalam spoke about the problems faced by the factory, saying, 'The greatest problem faced by the Palestinian market is the lack of skilled laborers and technicians due to a lack of qualified training centers. When the equipment breaks down, the employer takes it to Tel Aviv to be fixed, which cost us a lot of money.'

‘A second major problem faced by the investors in the Gaza Strip is the Value Added Tax (TAX) 17%. I have to pay the VAT several times,’ she added.

### **Mothers under the age of 15 in the village of Osarin Najwa Al-Qasem**

The article deals with the issue of early marriage and school dropout in the village of Osarin. The living and economic conditions of the residents are extremely poor. The majority of the female residents marry under the age of 15 years.

An eighteen-year-old young woman and mother of two daughters describes her life in the village as miserable and unbearable. She got married when she was 15 years old, an age in which the girl is not psychologically and physiologically prepared to marry and become pregnant. In addition, a girl is not prepared to be responsible for establishing a new family at this age.

A thirty-nine-year old man and father of six boys and five girls takes his two sons, 11 and 8 years old, with him to work in a nearby Jewish settlement to help relieve the family's financial pressure. Recently, his 15-year-old daughter married to a 17-year-old young man from the village. She said that she accepted to marry upon the desire of her parents.

Informed sources reported that 46% of divorce cases fall in the age group between 15 and 20 years. The rate decreases to 10% in the age group between 26-30 years and is 9% among the highest age groups.

It is noteworthy to mention that early marriage and unemployment are the main factors leading to divorce due to the fact that the married couples are not able to solve their family problems. The unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip is estimated to be 50% and 30% in the West Bank, according to recent statistics.

The article also addresses the issue of extended families in Palestinian society, stating that a majority of households are comprised of a father and his sons and wives.

### **Special Interview with Amneh Al-Rimawi**

The Palestinian labor force exceeds 500,000 laborers, 11.5% of which are women as opposed to 70.3% of men. This requires the enactment of a new Palestinian Labor Law in order to organize the work relationship between the employees and the employer and the government representatives for a stable national economy. The question is: Has the first and second reading of the Palestinian Labor Law been able to achieve economic and social justice for women? To answer this question and many more, an interview was conducted with Ms. Amneh Al-Rimawi, member of the General Union of the Palestinian Labor Union Executive Committee and the Secretary of the Women's Department at the labor union.

When asked if there is a legal discrimination between the working women in the public sector and the private sector, Ms. Rimawi replied by saying, 'There is a clear discrimination between the working women in the public sector and the private sector when it comes to the sick leaves and annual leaves. Working women in the private sector, for instance, are entitled to 14-day sick leave, while working women in the public sector are entitled to six-month sick leave. The same is true for the annual leaves. Working women in the private sector are entitled to 14-day annual leave, and one month in the public sector, which constitutes a violation of the Jordanian Labor Law, which allows for 21-day annual leaves.

Statistics for the year 1996 revealed a huge difference in the wages earned by men and women. How is the Palestinian Labor Law going to deal with the issue? 'The Palestinian Labor Law referred to the non-discrimination between men and women. With regard to the wages, it has been decided to form a special committee to determine the minimum wage for Palestinian employees working in different sectors in line with the cost of living without any discrimination between the two sexes,' she replied.

### ***Long Stories by Amal Al-Jouhari***

#### *She Died Miserably...*

He forced his sister to stay at home and prevented her from going to school in order to protect her from aberration. In a moment of despair she burnt herself. After her brother saved her life, she died miserably because her body was mutilated.

#### *The Groom Died...*

She sold her jewelry and spent the money on the fortune-tellers in the hope that she would find a groom. After she spent all her money, one of the fortune-tellers told her that the man who was for her died and that his body is buried in a nearby cemetery...

#### *Marriage of the Same Standard...*

He married a 14-year-old girl. After he pursued his higher education, he married another woman claiming that his wife does not suite his academic and social level.

### **Promoting medical checkups before marriage for healthy marital relations Hasan Salim, Women & Family Affairs Center**

The article highlights the importance of counseling and performing all the necessary medical checkups before marriage with the aim of establishing a family devoid of social, psychological and health problems. The article divides the medical checkups into three groups: first, routine checkups, which include blood test, chest and heart X-ray, urine test; second group, special checkups, which are based on the widespread diseases in the family and society, such as the Thalassemia, and inflammation of the liver; third group, focused checkups, which are based on the results of the special checkups and the results of the medical history of the marrying couples.

Scientific researchers confirm that the percentage of disabilities and congenital deformities is increasing as a result of the widespread phenomenon of intermarriage in Palestinian society. They unanimously agree that performing a medical checkup before marriage is the only way of reducing this phenomenon, which constitutes a burden on society and families that have children who suffer from congenital deformities.

Gynecologist Nahro Majaj calls on the marrying couples to perform laboratory checkups for the hereditary diseases, and to perform blood test, urine test, blood sugar test, AIDS and others. He confirms that Lebanon has approved legislation requiring marrying couples to undergo certain medical tests before marriage. The couples are then given a certificate showing that they do not suffer from any diseases that might affect their marital life.

### **Violence against women is increasing Khawlah & Mai Ahmad**

The article sheds light on the widespread phenomenon of violence against Palestinian women. A 32-year-old married woman and a mother of five children Um Ahmad tells her story, 'I was repeatedly beaten by my husband. As a result, I suffer a number of diseases, especially in the neck and the backbone. Nobody listens to me when I complain.'

'I often thought about leaving my husband but I preferred to stay because of my children. I don't know what to do especially when beats me in front of my children,' she adds.

A recent study, which was conducted by the Community Training Center on 718 men, revealed the following:

- 67% of those surveyed confirm that violence against women is widespread in Palestinian society
- 12% of those surveyed encourage violence against women
- 3% of those surveyed practice violence against women
- 84% of those surveyed point out that domestic violence in Gaza has increased in recent years

Another study, which was conducted by the Community Training Center on a sample consisting of 230 women, revealed the following:

- \*57% of women in the camp are exposed to violence
- \*46% of women in the village are exposed to violence
- \*26% of women in the city are exposed to violence.

The study confirms that the economic situation plays a role in the practice of violence against women. Seventy-four percent of women have been exposed to violence by men who are unemployed as opposed to 63% by men who are employed, the study notes.

**Suzan Kan'an: First Karate instructor in the northern West Bank  
Amin Abu Wardeh**

The article is about a 17-year-old high school student, Suzan Kan'an, from Nabus. In 1994, she joined a karate center in Nablus and mastered the art in a year and a half. She was awarded the Black Belt (1), the highest rank obtained by a female in the West Bank. Suzan does training for four girls at different ages, including university students and household wives.

Suzan was awarded the title of 'Champion of Palestine' by the Palestinian Association for Karate. She was expected to participate in Al-Hussein Sports Festival, which was held in Jordan, but due to the reduction of the number of participants by the association, she was unable to take part in the event.

### **Sewing factories present clear examples of discrimination in wages** **By Shahnaz Abed Al-Razeq**

The article sheds light on the differences in the wages between men and women in the sewing factories. The Director of the Statistics Program at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in Ramallah, Ms. Sana' Al-Asi, points out that there is a huge gap in wages between men and women in the same profession and from one to another. Wages earned by female workers in the West Bank are 34% less than those earned by male workers and 19% less in the Gaza Strip.

The Coordinator of the Working Women's Program at the Nablus branch of the Palestinian Working Women Society, Ms. Widad Al-Wazani, confirms that there is clear discrimination in wages between female and male workers in the sewing factories.