

**Voice of Women**  
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**Editorial**

The issue of male and female Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails is core in the long Palestinian struggle. Prisoners represent a large part of the struggle and their issues affect the greater part of Palestinian society as Israel inflicts punishment on their families and communities. Their case cannot be ignored. We notice here how skillful the Israeli occupation is in using prisoners as an additional front of attack on the Palestinian community, also further burdening the political sphere.

Israel tries to use the prisoners to divide the Palestinian society and diminish the contributions of the prisoners by offering to release only a small percentage of prisoners and associating their release with certain political affiliations. The goal is to open internal fronts within Palestinian political life, with an aim to forcing compromise on one of the most central issues of the Palestinian struggle.

Under such circumstances, the Palestinian position must be clear, non-debatable and non-divisible. Prisoners must be treated equally. We must reject the Israeli categorization of prisoners and their pretexts refusing to release detainees accused of killing Israelis. We must call for bringing to justice soldiers who committed hundreds of massacres, shelled civilian neighborhoods with missiles, and executed hundreds of assassinations before the eyes of the whole world. There is no room for compromise here because one concession will lead to another until all serious issues collapse.

**Female prisoner Ilham Almoghrabi suffers from cancer and separation from her baby**

Her name is Ilham Isma'eel Ali Almoghrabi. She is only 21 years old. She is a widow and the mother of an eight-month-old baby girl, Shahd. She lives in the Old Askar Camp near Nablus.

We met her family and her mother told us about the beginning of her suffering, before she was imprisoned. "My daughter and her sister Ola were engaged to two young Iraqi men in Jordan. We went to Jordan for the weddings. Ilham had undergone surgery to remove cancerous cells from her body. Four months after Ilham and her sister got married, we were ordered to leave Jordan.

Ilham returned to Askar Camp. She was four month pregnant. Her husband called asked about her and the baby regularly. He asked her to send him the ultrasound photos. Then, we suddenly stopped hearing from him and my other daughter's husband. My daughters became like widows, then we heard that their husbands had died in Jordan. That was the last we heard of them. When Ilham was in Nablus, she was admitted to the Women's Union Hospital for twenty days. She still needs regular medical checkups. After the calamity she suffered due to the death of her husband, Ilham started looking for a job through advertisements in local papers. She found one in Al Ram, near Ramallah. She rented an apartment and we followed her there where she continued working. Her daughter Shahd was born, and she struggled to make a living for her. Before she was arrested she had stopped working because of the current situation and was searching for a new job."

### **Unfair charges**

Her brother Mohammad told us how she was arrested, "When I was on my way back from Nablus to Ramallah, one of the passengers in the taxi said that the army was surrounding houses in Bier Nabala." The mother added, "The army circulated our house in Bier Nabala, near Ramallah, and raided the house, searching everything and destroying property. When they did not find anything, they evacuated everybody and asked us for our ID cards. Five hours later, they returned and asked where Ilham was. I said, here she is. She was hugging her baby and she turned pale. I screamed, "What do you want? Leave my daughter alone. Isn't it enough what she has been through?" They said, "Your daughter is planning a suicide attack," and arrested her. I have not laid eyes on her since then."

Shahd has not seen her mother since then either. She needs her mother's love, and her mother's milk. What is this innocent child guilty of?

### **What impedes the empowerment of Palestinian women?**

In a master's thesis prepared by Samr Bani Oudeh from Tamoun, the obstacles impeding women from being appointed to senior positions in administrative institutions were discussed.

The author concluded that she did not find impediments originating from religious texts, but rather from the traditions that had evolved from religion. As for the social factor, she documented that only a small percentage of women pursued higher education because families prefer to provide education to their male children. Moreover, women are usually oriented towards an education leading to teaching or nursing positions. On the political level, many laws are obsolete and do not take into consideration the specificity of women's situations as mothers and housewives. Even political parties that recognize the important role of women often exclude them from decision-making positions. This is true even of the leftist factions.

Women also lack access to training courses while men have opportunities to go on long training courses abroad; women have other obligations like children and housework that deprive them from such opportunities. Added to this are the conservative attitudes of society that frown on women working late hours. Moreover, women's wages are less than men's and there are no laws to protect them.

Most importantly, women's reproductive role is still viewed as an obstacle to their work and many organizations refuse to hire married women or ask women to resign when they get married. Furthermore, there aren't sufficient and adequate daycare services for children.

The study recommended that women be provided with opportunities to prove themselves in decision-making positions. To do this, women's organizations and decision-making centers must adopt a quota for women. There is also a need to provide women with training, especially women appointed to local authorities. The study stressed the need to solve the problems facing working women in order to enable them be more productive and innovative.

### **Girl from Gaza supports family of eight**

She is an ambitious girl, patient and hard working as a bee. She volunteered at a medical organization and then started working as an executive secretary in a medical NGO after she completed her medical secretary diploma.

This ambitious girl did not stop at this level; she went to university to study business administration while she continued working. She is currently in her second year. She is just twenty-three years old. She works fulltime from 8.00 am to 4.00 pm and receives a small salary which is shared with the eight members of her family and also helps her brother with his university fees. Her father is unemployed.

She is satisfied with the nature of her work although the pay is not high enough and the work is tiring. But she says her manager appreciates her work and respects her. However, what bothers her is how is treated by other employees who disregard her efforts, perhaps out of jealousy or because of her young age. She receives her pay, takes what she needs and gives the rest to her father to spend on their living. When asked if she would move to a better job if she has the opportunity to do so, she said yes, because her ambition is unlimited. She works all day and studies all night. She also said that her father used to work in a textile factory that was shut down because of the situation, and because of his ill health he cannot find a new job. He is sad that he cannot work to make a living for his family, but he is not ashamed to express his pride in his daughter.

She says that working has built her character and earned her the respect of her family, to the point that they consult her about their problems.

She provides an example of a successful and hard working young woman who is determined to keep moving ahead with her work and studies. But if she marries, who will provide for her family?

### **Bayan Alsweity: Deaf and dumb, she has proved herself as an artist**

Bayan Alsweity is only 16 years old. She was born with hearing and speaking disabilities, but she has proved herself in the art of cartoon drawing. She has faced every challenge and, refused to be limited by her disabilities, involves herself in her community in Hawarah, near Nablus. A hearing aid has provided a partial solution to her hearing problem, but a permanent solution is too costly for her family.

Her father said that she lost some of her friends because of her disability and the negative views society has of disabilities. This encouraged her to express herself through drawings and she has gained the respect and appreciation of all of her teachers because of her keen intelligence. Currently, she is studying computer drawing and is planning to publish her cartoons on the Internet. Bayan is proud of her father who keeps her updated on daily events, something she believes is crucial for the career she has chosen.

### **Bayan, like other women, still carries hopes and pains**

“My past has been stolen from me,” said Wafa’ Hamdan. Wafa was a student when she got married and dropped out of school for six years. Then, with determination, she re-enrolled in school and sat for the Tawjihi (General Certificate) exam. Twelve other women like her, aged 22 to 40, are also taking the exam. They have different goals: some want to be educated so that they can work and support their families financially; some want to help their children at university. Or, like Mrs. Nahla Mohammad, they want to become more self-reliant; they want to be one of the members of the family that brings in an income can participate in the financial decisions of the family. And others, like Mrs. Rima Rabee’, want to be more cultured.

The idea of bringing these women of different ages and backgrounds back to school came out of a women’s club in collaboration with the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees. Courses were organized in a classroom model to help them study in exchange for symbolic fees. This experiment is just a beginning and could lead the way for other endeavors to improve women’s status and enhance their education.