

**Voice of Women**  
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**Editorial: We must take the initiative**

Once again the Palestinian nation is being challenged, as part of its struggle for independence, with the call to reform. On the one hand, Palestinians consider it essential to start a process of reform of the National Authority and the society, on the other hand, they are faced by the U.S. and Israel's conditions for reform, which tend to conflict with Palestinians' national aspirations and will. In order to overcome this dilemma, honest national dialogue between all factions, parties and sectors of the Palestinian nation must take place. Crucial is the active participation of the Palestinian Women's Movement in such a dialogue, so that women's needs, aspirations and perspectives are considered on an equal basis. Also, women's participation in this debate demonstrates the relationship between the national-political and the social issues, reflecting that freedom can only be achieved when political, economic and social justice take root in all sectors of society, including the lives of women.

**Some are fired, others deprived of their salaries:**

**Hundreds of women workers suffer the consequences of the Israeli aggression**

**Ahmad Saleem, Ramallah**

All Palestinian workers, especially women, have been suffering enormously as a result of the Israeli aggression and continuous invasions of Palestinian areas, especially during the month of April during which Israeli forces destroyed hundreds of businesses, stores and organizations. Some employers have taken advantage of the crisis and disregarded the rights of their workers, particularly women, justifying their actions because of the economic disaster. Several women have shared their experiences with me; others refused to because they do not want to risk losing their jobs, no matter what abuses they are suffering. One 25 year-old woman who has worked for three years at a legal firm in Ramallah, was told

by her boss to sit at home until he needed her. Another saleswoman was told to do the same unless she agreed to work for 500 Shekels less than her current salary. Many have been fired, some have been given unpaid vacations, others have had their salaries reduced, and some have lost April's salary. Amneh Al-Rimawi, member of the executive committee of the Palestinian General Labor Union and the Director of the Women's Affairs Unit, illustrated two major violations of workers' rights after the Israeli invasion of Ramallah:

1. Thousands of workers, especially women, were not paid April's salary, in addition to five or six days from March's salary.
2. Many workers were fired collectively by their employers; for example, men working in quarries.

**He saved a fighter and lost his wife: The death of Suraida Abu Gharbiyyeh on a rainy night**  
***Voice of Women, Ramallah***

Murad Abu Gharbiyyeh, 28, described the day when he lost the most precious person in his life, his wife, Suraida. It was the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2002, at 3:30 a.m. Murad, Suraida, 21, and their ten-month-old son, were all fast asleep. He was woken up by someone knocking loudly on the door and found a Palestinian gunman at the door. He had been shot; he was bleeding and his lower part of his body appeared to be paralyzed. He had been dragging himself from one door to the next trying to find help, but with no response. It was a cold, rainy, foggy night; the first days of the Israeli reoccupation of Ramallah. With difficulty, Murad managed to pull the injured man onto his veranda. He was very heavy, so Murad went to find somebody from the nearby police station to help him. He found one police officer, who was very hesitant to accompany him, knowing the danger of passing through the streets at night Israeli snipers posted everywhere. But eventually he went along and helped to lift the injured man into Murad's car. They started driving to the hospital. Luckily, they found an ambulance on the road to hospital, which took the injured man. The police officer told Murad that the situation was getting tense and dangerous, and they had better take cover. He saw a group of other policemen and left with them. Murad rushed home and told his wife that they had better go to her parent's house, in case anybody had seen him helping the gunman. Murad never knew that this decision would steal his wife from him forever. They got into their car and drove in the direction of Suraida's parents' home. A few minutes later, an Israeli soldier shouted for Murad to stop. Murad thought the voice was that of a Palestinian, so he raised his hand, answering "We are Arabs!" Before he could finish his words the car was blasted with bullets, smashing the windows. Suddenly around 20 Israeli soldiers surrounded the car. One of them broke the back window and shot Suraida in the head with three bullets. Her last word was, "Murad!" Murad explained, with immense sadness, "She died, but then appeared to be sleeping, with our son smiling in her arms. My head was badly injured. I barely realized what was going on. I carried my son, falling to the ground several times, and eventually managed to reach my father-in-law's home. The soldiers shot at anybody who tried to bring us help. It was 7 a.m. before could I reach the hospital. The other day, while I was visiting Abu Rayyah Rehabilitation Center in Ramallah, I heard a weak voice calling me. It was the gunman who had been shot. He was barely able to speak. He thanked me for saving his life. He is the father of two daughters."

**80 Women killed since the beginning of the Intifada: 19 during this invasion**  
**Al-Majd Journalist Office, Gaza**

Israel's claim that it only kills armed Palestinian men is clearly absurd if you take a look at the many statistics documenting the killing of dozens of Palestinian civilians -- especially women and children. According to statistics released by the Women's Affairs Unit at the Palestinian Legislative Council, 80 Palestinian women have been killed by Israelis from the outbreak of the Intifada in September 2000 until mid-April 2002, of which:

- 32 are under 18 years of age
- 20 are elderly women
- 19 are from the West Bank
- 13 are from the Gaza Strip

According to statistics released by the Gaza Center for Rights and Laws, the total number of people killed since the beginning of the Intifada is 1641, out of which:

- 315 are under 18 years old
- 19 are newborn babies

The tragic story of Fatima Ibrahim Turkman Zakarneh, 30, and her children is one of many examples of Israel's brutal and racist policy of killing. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2002, Fatima was picking grape leaves with her two children Basel, 4, and Abeer, 3, on a piece of their land about 3500 meters east of Qabatia. Suddenly, two Israeli tanks and a military vehicle started shooting heavily and indiscriminately. Abeer's leg was immediately torn off her body; her mother and Basel were shot in the back while trying to reach her. Instead of saving them, the Israeli forces prohibited anybody from reaching the injured. Fatima's husband, sister and neighbors were in the field as well, but were immediately surrounded by Israeli soldiers and prohibited from moving or leaving for four hours, until the injured bled to death. Fatima's husband was forced to take off his clothes, leaving him in his underwear, adding to his humiliation and pain.

### **Battle for truth: Palestinian children confront their American counterparts Ahlam Hammad, Gaza**

As is happening in many other countries, the Young Journalist Club in Gaza initiated an Internet chat group with 12 Palestinian children in preparation for an international conference in Gaza focussing on the Palestinian childhood. This chat group has been conducting chat sessions with children's groups in other countries with the aim of conveying the Palestinian perspective of the ongoing conflict and the suffering the Palestinian people, particularly children, are undergoing. The group has worked hard to reflect the Palestinian reality and has been successful most of the time. They faced enormous difficulty in convincing two American children from Chicago about Israel's barbaric behaviour, such killing innocent Palestinian civilians, children, men and women, and destroying farmers' fields and people's homes. The American children first refused to accept these facts, insisting on the perspective they have adopted from the biased American media, but eventually they arrived at a position of neutrality. The Palestinian children expressed their shock and anger at Bush's description of Sharon as a "Man of Peace," when he is responsible for the killing of dozens of Palestinians -- including children -- in barbaric ways. They called upon all children of all nations to support them and to protest the Israeli aggression and injustice done to the Palestinians, noting that most children were already active in

participating in the ongoing demonstrations in support of the Palestinians in different countries worldwide.

**Transferred, killed and imprisoned: The brutal occupation threatens Palestinian education**  
**Ilham Abdulqader, Director of Private Education at the Ministry of Education**

Amid the ongoing Israeli aggression and perpetual occupation of the Palestinian nation and land, the Palestinian Ministry of Education has documented an increase in the number of students transferring from private to public schools. In order to examine this new phenomenon more thoroughly, the Ministry conducted a field study including all Palestinian private schools, elementary and secondary, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The study shows that 10,150 female and male West Bank and Gaza school students transferred from private to public schools between 1 September 2000 and 15 March 2002. The primary reason for this phenomenon is families' economic circumstances, which have badly deteriorated during this period. Hundreds of people have become unemployed and 15% of Palestinian families have lost their income. Public schools tend to be much more affordable than private schools. The Israeli closure around Palestinian areas, including Jerusalem, has further aggravated the problem, forcing school students to enroll in the nearest schools, which are usually public schools. From the beginning of the Intifada until 15/3/2002:

- 171 Palestinian students were killed by Israeli occupying forces, 27 of whom died during March 2002. Three teachers were also killed during March 2002.
- 62 students were arrested, five of whom were released. 22 teachers were also arrested, only 4 of them were released.

The following table provides further details of this phenomenon:

Phenomenon	1/9/00-1/9/01		1/9/01-15/3/02		Total	% of Total Private School Students
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
No. of students transferring to public schools	4120	3777	1454	799	10,150	18.4
No. of students leaving the country	367	287	261	257	1175	2
No. of female students dropping out due to early marriage	-	26	-	10	36	-
Jerusalemite students transferring to Israeli municipality schools	235	133	21	30	419	75
					<b>11,780</b>	

**Mothers of those besieged in the Church of the Nativity speak of their loved ones**

### **Juthur Lis-Sahafah, Gaza**

No one has suffered more than the mothers of the besieged men inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Their hearts, souls and thoughts were with their loved ones, wondering about their fate, imagining their deteriorating condition, and also remembering beautiful times together in the past. Like their besieged sons, they were barely able to sleep, eat or do their daily work, waiting for any bit of news coming out of the Church, hoping more than anything that their sons would come out safe and alive. Whenever they heard about somebody getting killed by Israeli snipers while inside the church, the anxiety of the mothers would become unbearable. Their only wish was to be able to hold their sons in their arms one more time, and they spent every moment anticipating their return. Israel's decision to deport the men was the last thing they expected. The mother of Tamer Al-Sheikh, a 56-year-old woman from Jabalia Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip, followed every second of the 39 long days of siege, while her son was trapped inside the Church. "When some of the besieged men were sent to the Gaza Strip, I rushed with my husband to see them all, asking them about our son, their situation and the circumstances they underwent. I felt they were all my children. When I saw how some of their companions were deported to foreign countries, others to Gaza, I was happy to know, even though I cannot see him, that at least my son is still in the West Bank amid his nation and friends." Similarly, the mother of Ala' Abu 'On from Khan Younis has anticipated her son's return to the Gaza Strip for more than a year, since he was working in the West Bank as a police officer. But because the Israeli closure prohibits anybody from moving from and to the Gaza Strip, her son was stuck in the West Bank, and unfortunately become one of those besieged in the Church. To her disappointment, her son was arrested and sentenced for two months to be served at Al-Naqab prison. She is still waiting for his return and wonders whether after his release he will be allowed to go to Gaza.

### **The Israeli occupation deprives Thalassemia patients of blood Rasha Misleh, Ramallah**

In Palestine there are 650 people suffering from the hereditary disease Thalassemia, most of whom are children. The continuing Israeli closure around and between Palestinian areas, in addition to the latest large-scale invasion of Palestinian cities during which curfews are imposed and everybody is prohibited from moving, has led to a deterioration in the health of Thalassemia patients, who need blood transfusions every two to three weeks. Ahmad Waleed, 14, Siham, 7, Aya, 12, and Haneen, 9, have suffered greatly under these circumstances, being prohibited from reaching hospital on time, and becoming weaker as a result. The Friends of Thalassemia Patients' Society has worked hard to get permission for their patients to reach hospitals, yet the process has been very difficult. Even when they are successful, the drivers of the ambulances carrying the patients are often harassed, humiliated and threatened with guns for long hours before being allowing to pass. Not only are these children deprived of living a natural and healthy life, but they are also subjected to extreme levels of fear and deprivation, putting their lives in danger. By doing so, Israel violates article 24 of the Children's Rights Agreement, which states that every child has the right to treatment and rehabilitation in available hospitals. The signatories of this agreement must guarantee this right, but Israel violates it day after day without being questioned or held accountable.

