

Voice of Women
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Editorial

Voice of Women begins its seventh year with renewed commitment to its social agenda and principles, its concern for development, democratic practices and the alleviation of women's problems. Our work to raise awareness about crucial issues that had been overlooked in public debate has earned us credibility and the trust of our readers, among the public in general and women in particular. *Voice of Women* has examined dysfunctional aspects of our social and political reality, and will continue to do so. Our intention is to make accurate documentation available to everyone, to build consensus among women and to empower them to voice their opinions about issues that affect their future.

The vision of *Voice of Women* goes beyond what is only temporary or sensational. We expose inequalities at work and at home, in education and marriage and the injustices to which a large number of women are subjected. When the current Intifada erupted, we devoted ourselves also to the concerns of the nation, in particular the great hardships that ordinary women are suffering. *Voice of Women* has been a live witness, covering events that affect women and their families day by day as a result of the cruel policies of the occupation. It has reflected their daily pain and agony, their fears for the children, the shortage of food, the rise of unemployment, the lack of access to health facilities, and all the tragedies caused by curfews and other occupation measures.

In this coming year, *Voice of Women* will go forward with its mission of activism for both social and political liberation.

Difficult deliveries

Mirvat Saqeq

Shereen El Omari never imagined that after three years of waiting for a child she would have to deliver without any medical assistance. "We planned, from the day I knew I was

pregnant, to make sure the child will be safe and healthy.” But what happened was different. Shereen lives in a village near the town of Qalqilia. Her village, and twenty others in the area, depend on a poorly equipped center in the village of Badya for basic health services. It does not have delivery facilities. For delivery and major operations, the villages depend on hospitals in Qalqilia and Nablus. To get there in the current conditions is almost impossible.

Since the start of the most recent Israeli incursion into the West Bank, it has become extremely difficult for Palestinians to travel between villages or to reach the major cities and towns. In this particular area, there are more than 20 Israeli colonies, inhabited mostly by extremist Zionists who make it their goal to harass nearby Palestinian villages, attack the residents, shoot at them, and burn their crops. These actions by the colonists are made worse by the fact that the Israeli army does nothing to prevent attacks by the colonists. Instead, the Israeli army makes it even more difficult for residents to travel between villages or get to the major centers by setting up scores of checkpoints and imposing frequent curfews. There have been many cases in which people have died because Israeli soldiers prevented them from crossing checkpoints in order to reach the hospital.

In the cases of women in labor, it is difficult to predict what problems might arise, such as premature birth or the need for a cesarean section. While women in villages now rely more on relatives, nurses and midwives, the results are not always good. In addition to the shortage of medical supplies, there are cases where normal delivery is not possible. In many cases, women have had to wait for several days after delivering their baby before they are allowed to go to the hospital and receive the care of a specialist, with the result that they often suffer serious complications requiring surgery. In the worst cases, deliveries in these circumstances result in the baby dying during birth or soon after.

Focus on children in Gaza: Feelings of persecution and loneliness

A new study in Jabalyia and Rafah refugee camps addresses the problems and needs of children. It is based on a survey of 160 male and female children aged 9 to 14. It was conducted by Save the Children, in cooperation with El Mizan centre for human rights and Gaza Program for Mental Health. In both camps, there was clear evidence of a lack of proper health care and adequate food, as well as school supplies. In schools, overcrowding has had a significant effect on student's ability to pay attention and there has been clear lack of participation in extracurricular activities. The study also documented violence occurring in homes and by teachers in schools, inadequate recreational activities and facilities, and poor relationships of children to adults. In Rafah in particular, the study noticed the damaging effects of violence by the Israeli army such as the bombing and destruction of homes and farmland.

The results of the survey indicated near unanimous agreement on the inadequacy of health and educational facilities, libraries, labs and playgrounds. The children agreed they had little in the way of sport activities and toys, and that adults did not appreciate enough the importance of play for the children and even considered it a waste of time. A large

number of the children surveyed expressed feelings of despair and a sense of insecurity, particularly relating to their physical surroundings and future prospects.

Several recommendations were put forth by the survey.

For Jabalia refugee camp in particular, the study recommended:

- Encouraging children to express their views on non-violence
- Awareness campaigns for parents
- Promoting laws and institutions to protect children's rights
- The establishment of a children's parliament
- Legislation to ensure a cleaner public environment
- Support for municipalities to implement environmental safety projects

For Rafah, the study recommended:

- Employment and investment initiatives
- Training for economic development
- Free school supplies
- Programs about conservation in consumption

In general, the survey recommended establishment of free recreational centers, training of teachers to provide extracurricular activities, advanced health centers and free distribution of medicine, water desalination plants, an industrial area away from residential areas, and regular medical checkups for students.

Fadwa Barghouthi remembers Yousef El Shayeb

Fadwa recollects some of the early days of her relationship with her husband Marwan Barghouthi. Readers may know that Marwan was arrested by the Israeli authorities last year. He is the Secretary General of Fatah and an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Fadwa told me about the beginning of their relationship more than 20 years ago and their long struggle since: "We are related through a common ancestor four generations back. So we knew each other as part of the larger family. I was going to school in Ramallah and he was at Birzeit, but I never thought our relationship would lead to marriage. When I was 19 -- that is, in 1978 -- Marwan was arrested by the Israelis for his political activities and put in prison for four and a half years. While in prison, he wrote that he wanted to marry me. I immediately agreed, even though my family was unsure since they thought of Marwan as a man with an uncertain future."

Fadwa and Marwan were in love, and Fadwa was confident of Marwan's character and dedication. He had finished high school while still in prison, where he also mastered English and Hebrew and learned some French. Upon his release, they decided to remain

engaged for a few months before marriage. He made it clear during that time that he was determined to continue the struggle for independence and expected that he could be arrested many times, and therefore could not guarantee that he would be with Fadwa and their future children all the time. They were married in 1983. The marriage ceremony was unusual since both of them were students at Birzeit University, with Marwan still engaged in student politics and pursued by the Israelis, making him unable to participate fully in the wedding preparations. The wedding ceremony was held in the village of Kobar. It was a patriotic event, with several political speeches, folkloric songs and the national folk dance, *dabke*.

Marwan was not present for the birth of any of his four children. As Fadwa recounts, Marwan was arrested shortly before she delivered their first child, Al Qassam, in 1985, so he first saw the child one week after the birth while he was on hunger strike in an Israeli prison. At the birth of Ruba, the second child, he was living in the hills, pursued by the Israelis. The third child, Sharaf, was born in 1989, and 'Arab in 1990, both while Marwan was in exile. Fadwa had to return to the West Bank to give birth in order to make sure that the children would retain West Bank residence.

In 1994, Marwan returned from exile after the Oslo Accord. He had just completed his BA degree, after ten years. He continued his studies at Birzeit and obtained an MA in international relations, while Fadwa completed an MS in Law from Al-Quds University. He was subsequently elected Secretary General of Fatah and also member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Fadwa has also been active in politics, in social work and in women's committees. She says that Marwan is a great supporter of women's rights and equality. She sees him in prison whenever allowed to do so. Fadwa affirms that Marwan is high in spirits and he encourages Fadwa and the Palestinian people to persevere, since victory is sure to come. He believes that the Palestinian people have no fear in their struggle for independence, and he refuses to let the Israelis assume that fighting for independence is something for which they can place him or any other Palestinian on trial.