

**Voice of Women**  
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**Editorial: The Palestinian Women's Movement and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Every year the various women's movements use the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, the International Day of Women, as day of evaluation and assessment of their achievements, as well as their failures. Following is a brief chronological summary of the Palestinian Women's Movement's role since the early thirties until today.

- 1930s: first women pioneers emerged as part of the overall national movement
- 1940s, 1950s (post-Nakba period): women's movements provided social services through establishing centers for orphans, the needy, and homeless refugees
- 1960s, 1970s, 1980s: women's movements were part of the anti-occupation resistance and encouraged vast social and communal participation. they also played a role in the anti-occupation military resistance
- 1990s: the Palestinian Intifada, and peaceful resistance. Here, women's roles have started to be questioned. The public-private dichotomy emerged, questioning women's compatibility between the national and the domestic duties. Several opinions emerged, some of which insisted on complete separation between the two spheres, arguing that women's social rights are only of concern to women and are therefore not related to national interests and must be addressed separately
- 2000, 2001: the second Intifada illustrates once again the fact that women's issues, rights and needs are a crucial part of the overall national struggle, and that no national and political freedom can be achieved without women's social freedom

During the previous six years under the control of the Palestinian National Authority, it has become clear that civil, social, economic and political rights for Palestinian citizens, especially women, cannot, and must not, be denied. Women's issues are political and of great importance on the path to freedom and a civil democratic Palestinian state.

## **Announcing the establishment of a Legal Committee within the General Union of Palestinian Women, Gaza**

During a celebration on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, the General Union of Palestinian Women announced the establishment of a legal committee that would address women's issues and concerns from a gender point of view and illustrate women's legal rights. Following are the main aims of the committee:

- Achieve equality between men and women. Support and protect women in achieving their legislative and civil rights and assist them in facing and challenging discriminatory social customs and traditions
- Increase women's awareness of their legal rights, as many women have been deprived of their rights as a result of their ignorance and lack of knowledge
- Influence decision-makers to adopt equal, gender-sensitive principles when laws, legislation and policies are formed
- Provide women with objective legal guidance and free services

Many important figures spoke during the celebration, addressing the important role of women throughout the Palestinian conflict, the fact that their suffering has not only been confined to the political dimension as a result of occupation but also includes the social dimension as a result of discriminatory traditions and customs. The importance of involving women in legal and legislative matters was highlighted. The celebration ended on a positive note, with a surprise from the Palestinian Authority's Deputy Judge who announced that he had finishing the preparation of the personal status law which includes the right to separation in marriage, a demand the women's movement has been calling for for more than three years.

## **Hundreds of Palestinian women protest on their destroyed land Gaza**

The city of Beit Lahia, in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, has faced a viscous attack by Israeli military forces over the past five months. Israeli bulldozers and tanks have destroyed about 1000 agricultural dunums of land, demolished 20 water cisterns, and destroyed about 20 homes.

The General Union of Palestinian Women, women's organizations and centers, and the Agricultural Relief Union called for a protest in commemoration of the International Day of Women. Protestors called for the following:

- International protection for the Palestinian people
- Removal of Israeli settlements
- And end to Israel's massacres of the Palestinian people
- Support for Palestinian farmers whose lands have been demolished

Many women addressed the role of women in the current Intifada, saying that they have not been absent from the struggle and that all women take part in the resistance but in different ways, not necessarily through direct confrontation with Israeli military forces.

Among those participating in the protest were:

- An elderly woman carrying her daily medication in her hands, insisting on participating and supporting her people and neighbors
- Women university students
- Mothers with their children
- Women political activists

This provided an example of the deep involvement of women from all walks of life.

### **Reconsidering strategies to empower women Maktab Al-Majd Lissahafeh, Gaza**

During a seminar entitled "Women's Role throughout the Intifada," two leading Palestinian women proposed as a new slogan for the resistance, "He and She." They addressed the role women have played throughout the years, whether on a social or political level. They mentioned various examples illustrating women's deep involvement in the political struggle, such as the martyr Dalal Al-Mughrabi, women prisoners and demonstrators. As far as the current Intifada is concerned, they said that women's roles have indeed taken a different form, yet must not be underestimated. Following are a few aspects in which women have been involved during the current Intifada:

- Participating in the medical emergency groups: 80% of the workers in the emergency committee in the central part of the Gaza Strip are women
- Relieving the families of martyrs and children
- Visiting the injured
- Organizing protests and peaceful demonstrations

In closing, all participants at the seminar agreed on the need to develop new strategies and clear agendas that can empower women and grant them more opportunities to be equal participants. They also addressed the importance of giving women of the younger generation the opportunity to participate and not reserve decision-making and participation to the elderly women leaders.

### **Children spend their holidays in graveyards Samar 'Abdul Rahman 'Awadallah**

Many Palestinian children have been killed, others have been injured or orphaned, leaving them traumatized, overwhelmed with sadness and fear. While walking through a Palestinian neighborhood in Al-Bireh, I was surprised to see the neighborhood kids

staying close to the steps of their homes. I talked to them, asking them why they were not playing freely, and a 10-year old child answered that the nearby Pesagot Israeli settlers have turned their lives upside down by killing their friend and shooting at their homes, bedrooms and streets. Another 12-year old child expressed her fear of being kidnapped by the settlers if she went beyond the steps of her home. Muhammad, whose mother was shot and killed by Israeli settlers while returning home from shopping for the Adha Feast, said with great sadness how he would never forget that feast which brought him new clothes, yet the loss of his special, loving mother. How could our children even live to hope for a brighter future, while the most precious days of their lives, the most intimate moments of family life are stolen by an Israeli bullet and substituted by a long agonizing visit to a mother's tomb, a child's or brother's resting place? Our children are being exposed to devastating, brutal experiences forcing them to grow up before their time and depriving them of their innocent childhood and futures.

**Marginalizing the women's struggle**  
**Hassan Saleem, Markiz Shu'un Al-Mar'a wal-Usra, Nablus**

Women's struggle and role throughout the Intifada has been underestimated. Amidst all the suffering, loss and pain women have undergone when losing a husband, a son or a brother, a huge responsibility has been put upon their shoulders. They have had to assume the roles of both father and mother, providing for the family and bearing full financial responsibility. This is a great injustice to these women, especially considering that in our society women tend to be dependent on their male relatives. It is a great shock and enormously difficult for a woman to start bearing such a responsibility when having for years depended on her husband.

The fact that the number of women martyrs is less than that of men doesn't mean a lot. The Palestinian patriarchal structure confines women to certain roles, and puts social barriers in their way to direct confrontation with the Israeli occupation forces. Women, however, have taken great responsibility and played a huge role in other non-confrontational struggles, such as peaceful marches, encouraging the embargo on Israeli products, media coverage and providing first aid to the injured. Direct confrontation isn't the only measure by which a class, sex or group is given credit, respected or granted acknowledgment of their role. There are other levels of confrontation, not necessarily violent.

**Social Center for the Rehabilitation of Girls**  
**Shihnaz Abdul-Raziq, Nablus**

Many girls in the Palestinian society are deprived of basic human needs and rights, such as the freedom to leave the house, enroll in schools and colleges, or choose their own field of study. This is a result of social, traditional and customary regulations and beliefs. We interviewed girls around eighteen or nineteen years of ages from the village of Rojeeb in the Nablus district. One girl stated that due to the belief that women belong to

the private sphere, within the walls of the house, she and her five sisters are barely allowed to leave their home. They were not even enrolled in schools for primary education or given the chance to choose their future husbands. They had reached the conclusion that no matter what their opinion was of their situation, they didn't dare to think or question their role or "duty" but must follow the customs as expected of them as women. Another girl was given the chance to study computers, yet was forbidden to apply her education practically. For other girls, choosing their field of study was considered inappropriate and a socially accepted field would be chosen for her, regardless of whether she was interested in it or not. For the most part, girls are seen to be most fit for subjects within the faculty of arts.

As a result of such unfair treatment of women, a Social Center for Rehabilitation for Girls was established as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Nablus. This center provides teen-aged girls, whose family, physical, academic and psychological conditions tend to be difficult and non-stable, with various educational and counseling services. The girls are given both social and vocational rehabilitation, prepared for taking social responsibilities, and counseled in regards to choosing a field of study with a focus on the most needed tasks or fields in society. Such a center is of great help and importance to our teen-aged girls, especially the victims of social traditions.

**Palestinian Women: Back to agriculture as a result of closure and poverty**  
**Azeezeh Nofal, Nablus**

As a result of the six-month closure imposed by Israel on all Palestinian villages, cities and land, many people have become unemployed, especially those working within Israel. As a result, many Palestinian women were forced back to agricultural life to provide once more for their families, something many of them had left behind in the past few years of the peace process. Women, who used to depend on buying most of their food from the nearby market, have found an alternative by planting their own vegetables and wheat, in addition to rearing sheep and goats for home use. Many women and families are now following this self-sustaining initiative in an attempt to alleviate poverty and provide basic necessities for their families.