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Editorial: One's weakness can be a source of strength!

During the past months, many images have been circulated contrasting Palestinians, portrayed as bloodthirsty, senseless terrorists, with Israelis, portrayed as the innocent victims of Arab barbarism. It is easy to film images at a Palestinian march at which gunmen are shooting and calling for revenge. And perhaps it is difficult to believe that within the same society people are grieving and mourning, weeping and hurting as a result of Israel's brutal and unmatched aggression and inhumane attacks against Palestinian children, women and men.

The fact that Palestinians are portrayed as the perpetrators and Israelis as mere victims defending themselves is a product of the established social perception of manhood that originates from deep within traditional norms, belief and ideologies. Israel has found sympathy among the international audience by demonstrating their 'humanity' through the images of grieving families. But in Palestinian society, showing one's tears means showing one's weakness, and thus, lack of manhood. This is a complex dynamic that is deeply rooted in the culture, resulting in a distortion of true feelings and heartfelt grief. Palestinian women are more easily able -- and are even expected -- to cry for the loss of a family member, but men are not and instead attempt to show their grief by expressing hatred and anger against the humiliation and aggression of the Israeli occupation. It is important to realize, however, that exposing one's true feelings through weeping is not necessarily a sign of surrender or weakness but can be a symbol of strength, and motivate the sympathy of others for one's cause.

Hala Al-Astal loses her baby and her motherhood forever
Itidal Qneita, Gaza

Since the beginning of the Intifada on the 29th of September 2000, fifteen Palestinians and dozens more babies lost their lives at the Israeli blockades that exist throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israeli military forces prohibit people from passing the barriers to reach hospitals, forcing women to deliver their babies in front of callous soldiers. This places them in danger of losing their lives or their babies' lives, or suffering from damage to their uterus or experiencing heavy bleeding. Hala Al-Astal from Gaza was forbidden to reach the hospital when she was due to deliver; soldiers stopped her at every checkpoint despite her frantic screams. When she was finally allowed to pass through, she was unconscious. She woke up to find herself with a dead baby and her uterus removed. Many other women face the agony of reaching hospitals everyday, they have to wait for hours at Israeli blockades and drive through mountainous and dangerous roads hoping to reach the hospital in time.

Sick men undergo the same suffering. Sabri Mahmud from Tulkarem district suffered from kidney failure. When soldiers refused to let him pass the blockade on the way to the hospital, he died. Others who have suffered heart attacks are also left to die under the humiliating and merciless gaze of Israeli soldiers. Which international laws or declarations allow such inhumanities to take place?

Palestinian child prisoners defy Israel in solitary confinement *Voice of Women, Ramallah*

Since the beginning of the Intifada, Palestinian children between fourteen to eighteen years of age have been primary targets of Israel's aggression and brutal attacks. They have been shot, injured and killed, but also imprisoned in terrible conditions. They are either arrested at Israeli blockades or from their own homes, torn from their families in the middle of the night, beaten, tied with ropes and thrown into solitary confinement cells. More than twenty child prisoners are held in Israeli jails, most of them kept among Israeli criminal prisoners which exposes them to harassment, knife attacks and robbery. As a result, child prisoners are forced to stay awake on shifts through the night to protect themselves from attacks. Their convictions are usually for stone-throwing and they are arbitrarily sentenced to either six months in prison and a 2000 shekel fine, as in the case of a child who confessed to having thrown stones on a specific day although no Israeli soldier was hit; or they are sentenced for a year and a half in addition to a fine if the stones hit a soldier. Such trials of minors are illegitimate, failing to provide the children with full legal rights. Children often confess to acts they may not have committed while being tortured severely during interrogation. The Defense for Children International/Palestine Section is working hard to illuminate the issue of child prisoners despite Israel's continuous attempts to block their efforts.

Training women in time management and assertiveness skills

As part of the Advocacy for Equal Rights for Women through Strengthening the Networking of Women Institutions and Committees Project, implemented by the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, a 24-hour training course was conducted on "Time Management, Report and Proposal Writing" targeting the project's field coordinators. This course was implemented in Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus with the participation of 20-25 women at each session. It focused on using time management skills to more effectively accomplish one's goals as well as skills for successful project management.

In Gaza three training courses were offered on Crisis Management, Coping with Fear and Anxiety, and Assertiveness. The aim of the training courses was to empower women and prepare them for emergency situations, as well as to build their awareness of issues relevant to their work at the grassroots level or within their respective organizations.

Field coordinators also conducted training courses, workshops and meetings with women in various areas on Crisis Management and on Coping with Behavioral Problems in Children Resulting from the Political Situation.

The daily suffering of Palestinians on the endless roads of agony Shahnaz Abdul-Raziq, Nablus

The districts of the West Bank and Gaza have been turned into isolated areas. The roads used to access them have been bulldozed, destroyed or merely closed to traffic. When one thinks of travelling from one village to the other, one must be prepared for a long agonizing journey on roads that often lead to nowhere or paths which turn into labyrinths with no end. Hiba Mansur, a Journalism and Media student at An-Najah University in Nablus, needs six hours to reach her university everyday. She has to pass through mountainous roads and remote areas and villages to get to class, always afraid she will end up missing an exam one day and lose her opportunity to get an education. Another woman talked about her suffering at the Israeli blockade imposed between her village, Beit Dajan, and Nablus. Dozens of people were waiting to cross the blockade with no success. They were also not allowed to return to wherever they had come from. Elderly men, women and crying children were forced to stand all day under the extreme heat of the sun, while Israeli soldiers stood and watched with no mercy. Anyone thinking to go to Nablus must give careful thought to whether it is really necessary to go or not. Many people who work in Nablus are now facing the dilemma of either quitting their jobs, with no other alternative on the horizon, or to move to Nablus with the hope of having a more normal life. This immense suffering, faced by thousands of Palestinians everyday, has continued for ten months now.

The role imposed by traditional society on women: Women read more than men Gaza

A survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics conducted over the period of 8 May 2000 through 7 May 2001 shows the following:

- A higher percentage of men than women engage in production, outdoor or public activities. A higher percentage of women than men engage in domestic, care-taking and food-related activities
- Similar percentages of men and women have an interest in, and use, media such as television or radio
- 14.1% of women spend time reading, in contrast to 9.5% of men

**Many Palestinians have become disabled during the Intifada:
Our stereotypes must change!**

Nadira Ismail, from Kobar village, has had a disability in her legs since she was a child. As a result, she couldn't pursue her primary education and was sent to a school for disabled children in Bethlehem, where she learned skills to cope with her disability and deal with the psychological aspects of it as well as practical skills such as sewing and embroidery. This has helped her to gain independence, and she began making a living through her art. In most of the homes in Kobar, one can find embroidery or an artistic piece made by Nadira. She has learned how to survive despite being disabled and has challenged prevailing stereotypes and has stood resolutely on her disabled feet demanding a life of equality with 'normal' people. She has insisted on the need to change social perceptions, especially at this time when thousands of Palestinians have become disabled as a result of Israeli shooting, shelling and aggression. Nadira believes that "having a disability does not necessarily mean being useless; in fact many 'normal' people are a burden to their families and are useless despite not physically being disabled!"

**When blood and shrapnel dry the tears of children
Amin Abu Wardeh, Nablus**

Three-year-old Malak 'Abdul Nasir Shabaro and her four-year-old brother 'Ammar are still being hospitalized for injuries they sustained from shrapnel from the explosion when Israeli forces assassinated Usama Jawabreh on the 25th of June 2001 in Nablus. A few seconds before his death, Jawabreh handed a shekel to Malak and told her to go and buy whatever she wanted with it. She had barely paid the kiosk man for the sweets when she was thrown in the air and found herself lying helpless near the bloody body of Jawabreh, their faces turned towards each other. He was dead, and she was shocked to see her brother lying covered with blood nearby too. The only words she managed to say were, "Mama, mama, they shot me..." without crying any tears. Her injuries are more serious than her brother's, and she will be having surgery soon. "The soldiers shot me...I hate them," are the words she said, sitting beside her mother at the hospital.

