

Voice of Women
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Editorial: Is There Development Under Occupation?

Last week, two important conferences were held in Palestine in which United Nations' organizations participated. The first was the *Education for All* conference, in which UNICEF, UNESCO and UNRWA took part in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as community organizations working the fields of social education and early childhood. At the second conference, *The National Conference for Development*, ESCWA had participated in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning, other ministries, and community organizations.

Also last week, we witnessed in Palestine an escalation in Israel's terrorism and aggression, with harsh closures, home demolitions, and assassination attacks which interfered with development work and education. For example, in Gaza, a residential building was targeted and in Nablus four people were assassinated while driving in a car. Roads were strictly blocked, making it impossible many times for people – including doctors – to go where they needed to. In the Bethlehem area, the occupation forces blocked schools and institutions for an entire week and forced people and students to go back to their homes, attacking anyone who tried to open their shops with teargas, and shooting rubber-coated bullets at anybody found in the streets. The people of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour witnessed the systematic destruction of their personal property, with tanks crushing any cars that were parking on the sides of the streets.

The question is: can development in different fields, including education, be carried out under occupation? Can education be accessible to everyone when roads to schools are blocked and children and teachers are denied access? The *Education for All* conference, focused on collaboration between educational institutions and improving the quality of education during the next phase, but is it possible to improve the educational conditions under the current circumstances?

Statistics presented by Mr. David Basyouni, the UNICEF special representative, confirmed that achieving these goals will be extremely difficult under the current

circumstances, and it must be taken into account that much of the resources are directed to relief efforts.

In spite of all this, there is determination in the Palestinian community to face these challenges and fulfill the criteria set by international conferences by finding creative alternatives that integrate both relief and development programs and help to continue the educational process, even under emergency conditions.

Women's participation in local councils

Voice of Women Exclusive, Gaza

To support and strengthen women's participation in local municipal elections, the Society of Women's Voice has organized the first workshop of its kind. This activity covered the middle area governorates that include a number of Palestinian camps in which the percentage of refugees exceeds 80%. The workshop focused on women's participation in the elections, especially for those who want to run in the elections instead of leaving them entirely to men. These women have worked with men and play an active role in service provision, decision-making and providing many social benefits. These issues were raised in the workshop, which was held at the municipality of Al Breij, with broad representation of women's organizations.

Reem Abu 'Athra, head of the Women's Department at the Ministry of Local Government, tackled the concerns and issues of women in Palestinian society. She said that the Ministry of Local Government has a strategy to mobilize women in local and municipal councils. They have experienced some success in the northern governorates, but have not yet implemented the strategy in the south. Abu 'Athra indicated that in order to achieve this, the Ministry of Local Government has established departments with key women players from the local communities in all municipalities and local councils. These women work as volunteers, providing a link between the municipality and the people. Abu 'Athra also clarified stressed the importance of women participating in the next municipal elections. She emphasized the role the funds provided by the European Union have played in encouraging the role of women in municipalities, since a condition of many European donors is the participation of women in the proposed project. She believes that the women's movement can help to place women in the appropriate positions in Palestinian society, especially since the society is steadily moving towards giving women more rights and leading roles in civil and political life, as well as bridging the gap between men and women in decision-making.

Social Development

Abeer Jabir, an attorney, tackled the importance of the role of women in development. She criticized the limited participation of women in the governmental sector (10%-16%), while men occupy most of the high positions. She also referred to the remark that women are hired only by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. She explained that this is due to several reasons, most important of which are

the weak women's movements, competition between women and customs and traditions limiting women's participation. She explained the conditions for elections, clarifying that the elections' law treats all as equals without any kind of discrimination. In this regard, she called for unification of all women's efforts in indigenous organizations, as well as in the organizations that are interested in women, in order to adopt a quota system in the elections and to break the stereotype associated with women and integrate them into civil society institutions on a larger scale. The most recent poll by the Palestinian Center for Social Conflict Resolution shows that 87.8% of people in the Gaza Strip support holding elections to select heads of local and municipal councils. The poll surveyed 600 men and women.

Partnership and Integration

Mr. Kamal Baghdadi, Mayor of Al Briej, confirmed the necessity of women's participation in the local council, as well as supporting their role to serve the public. He also discussed the work mechanism of Al Briej Municipal Council and the role of women in decision-making in this council. He stressed that there is no struggle between men and women; rather they have achieved partnership and integration based on efficiency and experience. He indicated that the Palestinian woman's role has been always based on sacrifice and success as a mother, a militant, a doctor, a lawyer and she is the one who raises the next generation. He confirmed that the Municipality of Al Briej will integrate the woman's vision inside the camp by holding meetings. He believes that the nature of our society, in addition to its customs and traditions, limit women's participation. He concluded that women's rights should be taken but they should qualify themselves in accordance to the role they want and what is beneficial to the society.

A New Nakbeh (Disaster)

On the fifty-seventh anniversary of the first Nakbeh, the nation is going through a new Nakbeh that is as dangerous as the first which took place in 1948. Then, 900 Palestinian were expelled from their houses and homeland. Today, events taking place in Rafah have resulted in 1794 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip alone being with no refuge. In addition, the wall which Israel is constructed is confiscating 46% of the total area of the West Bank.

The reason, the cause and result are the same: to kick Palestinians out of their land under the justification of security. Even the Balfour Declaration, in spite of its disadvantages, had the condition of not harming the native people of Palestine. However, this was not taken into consideration. Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (194) of 1948 clarified that the return of the refugees to their land is a condition for the recognition of the State of Israel.

The constant Israeli rejection of the right of return of the Palestinian refugees is not only motivated by demographic reasons, but also by the fact that the return of the refugees is ardent evidence that Palestine was inhabited by its people. As a result, the claim that

Palestine was a land without people cannot be supported. Using this claim, establishing the State of Israel was justified: a land with no people for a people with no land.

The Peace Process could have provided a plausible resolution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nevertheless, it is clear that the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin was the Israeli response to this Peace Process. Since then, all international solutions broke down leaving nothing but the right wing's agenda. It is obvious that Sharon's plans are not finished yet and we will suffer more and more destruction, deportation, land confiscation, assassinations and arrests.. It is evident that the only solution that is being considered is being carried out unilaterally. It is a solution based on gradual deportation and on de facto policies. The justification for all this is fighting terrorism.

Concepts have been reversed. A liberation movement became terrorism; occupation became an enemy for terrorism and is calling for freedom. How did the events of September invert all these concepts? How did it make a genocide look like an activity against terrorism? Will the peace camp continue to watch? Will it swallow Sharon's lie till the end? If withdrawal from Vietnam resulted from internal pressure in America, withdrawal from the Palestinian Territories requires a loud voice from the peace camps in Israel and throughout the world. What is going on now is nothing but an attempt to destroy the Palestinian ability to struggle, endure and aspire for an independent state. It is an attempt to leave the Palestinian people in despair and isolation through enforcement of inequality and refusal to recognize our people's right to live.

The extraordinary concerns of an ordinary woman: Nakbahs (Disasters)

Itaf Yousef

What I have stored in my memory about the Nakbeh is not much because I was born a decade after it happened. However, my grandmother told me a lot about it. Although my homeland was not directly affected by the outcomes of the Nakbeh of 1948, we were not very far away. This is because my grandfather was the Mukhtar of the village and he had strong relationships with Al Ramllh, Al Lid and the surrounding villages as a result of commercial interactions. As a result, Al Qibab, Al Mzeir'a, Pervillia and Jimzo were names frequently mentioned in our house. We had strong relations with people from these villages, especially those who took refuge in my grandfather's house. They did not stay there for long. After that, they looked for places in the camps in Ramallah and its villages or far away in Jordan and other countries in the diaspora. Nevertheless, our relationships are still strong even if the circumstances keep us apart.

Two people are left in the village, a man and a woman, brother and a sister. I have never known the man's real name. He was known as Abu Amineh (Amineh's Father). Amineh was expelled with her husband to Jordan. She never came to visit her father or her aunt, not even once, neither before the occupation of the West Bank nor after. The woman's name is Safyeh. When I knew her, she was close to fifty and her brother was a bit older than her. They lived in an abandoned house; the owners had left after the death of their mother. The children took different roads in their lives. The house was not good to live

in. Nevertheless, these two people did not have any source of income other than what the villagers used to give them in return for some symbolic services they used to provide. Abu Amineh used to do all the work that female villagers used to ask him to do; to dig, to plough, to sow, to remove the stones from the soil, to carry water from the spring and to pick the figs, grapes and olives. He also worked in the village's mill with its two big stone rundles; he used to carry the olive oil jars. In other words, he did whatever he could to get some food and clothes. He rarely took money in return. Safyeh used to do housework for people: sweeping, washing, baking, fetching the water from the spring, and so on, in return for some pieces of bread, some food, or clothes; just like her brother. This man used to attract my attention when I was child because he wore strange pants that I hadn't seen before. At first, he was almost the only to wear them but later, others started to do the same. Unlike other men in the village, I never saw him putting the turban and the head cord on his head.

Children were forbidden to go to Abu Amineh's and his sister's house and I do not know the reason till today. However, when he used to come to our place to do some agricultural work, he used to put me on his lap and tell me stories about his village, Pervillia, the well-off life he used to have, his citrus orchid, house and fig trees and the water spring in his orchid. I used to jump off his lap, lie on the ground in front of him and look directly into his eyes. I could see the tears he tried to hide while he spoke. He used to let them go at night in darkness of the deserted house, which he lit with a small lamp that gave light only to a small area.

The man and the woman grew older and so did I. It was no longer acceptable for me to sit on his lap. Nevertheless, I disobeyed the rules and went to that dark house. As soon as I entered, I smelled the moisture in the ancient stones, which looked as if they were hanging in the air. I was afraid that one of them would fall on my head. Now, they were in poor health and no longer able to provide the villagers with their services. Nonetheless, they still received food and clothes, though not as much as before.

The villagers did not know what to do for these two people. At the time, I was in prison and my family used to tell me their news. Their health deteriorated until they had lost almost all their sight, hearing and mobility. Their house started to smell bad. One of the educated villagers moved them to a home for the elderly in Ramallah where they passed away.

I remember these two people each year with the anniversary of Al Nakbeh and realize the problems the refugees had at the international, Arab and even the Palestinian levels, because the villagers did not treat the refugees as their equals.

The memory of the Nakbeh gets renewed each year and has become a series of Nakbehs. Two years ago, a Nakbeh took place in Jenin refugee camp, where 600 houses were totally demolished and more than 200 were partially demolished. Till now, thousands of the people in the camp are waiting to be able to return to their homes.

The most painful memory is the recent events in Rafah and its camp. There, a criminal plan is being implemented, with hundreds of houses being demolished. According to UNRWA, 17,594 people had been made homeless in Gaza Strip as of last Monday. They have no refuge now that their homes have been demolished by the Israeli army. Some of the houses were destroyed while their owners were still inside. Dead bodies were pulled from under the ruins in the Zaytoun neighborhood in Gaza. Most of the houses were demolished with all the furniture inside as well as the few valuable people had collected over the years. People left their houses in shock, waiting to be gathered in tents, just as in the first Nakbeh.

90% support women's participation in the next elections Bilal Gheith

The latest poll conducted in the Palestinian Territories, published in Ramallah on 6th June, showed that 90% of Palestinians are in favor of voting for women in the elections. The percentage in Gaza Strip is 89.8% and 91.4% in the West Bank. This poll, which was conducted by Alpha International Company for Research, Information and Polls, indicated that 40.2% support women running for president (29% in Gaza and 46.3% in the West Bank). 56.9% support women running for local elections (56.7% in Gaza and 57% in the west Bank).

A quota for women

The poll shows that 62.8% support having a quota for women (61.5% in Gaza and 63.5% in the West Bank). This quota must be determined by the Legislative Council. The support for the quota was as follows:

- 2.2% support a 5% quota
- 30% support a 10% quota
- 20.6% support a 15% quota
- 29.6% support a 20% quota
- 2.4% support a 30% quota
- 1.8 % support a 40% quota
- 7.4 % support a 50% quota

The President and Prime Minister

49.3% of the population indicated that they would vote for Yasser Arafat as a president of the PNA. Marwan Barghouthi followed Arafat in second place (14.3%). For Prime Minister, Marwan Barghouthi took first place (34.7%) and Mustafa Barghouthi second (14.8%). Regarding voting for the political parties, results were as follows: Fatah (29.5%), Hamas (30.3%), PFLP (0.2%), Fida (0.9%) the Democratic Front (0.5%) the Population Party (2.8%), the Islamic Jihad (18.9%) and independents (14.4%).

Concerning the prisoners in the Israeli prisons and elections, the poll clarified that 59.6% support having political prisoners running for presidential elections, 70.5% are with prisoners running for parliamentary elections and 65.2% support their running for local elections.

The Prime Minister (PM) and his/her authority

This item dealt with the Palestinian population's view regarding the Prime Minister's position, as well as his authorities, compared to the president's. 67.9% think that the prime minister should have less authority than the president, 22% believe that the prime minister should have more, 2.7% support other positions and 7.4% are undecided.

Support and participation in elections

The results showed that 31.6 % support holding elections immediately without any conditions, 29.2% support holding elections after the Israeli Forces' withdrawal to the pre-Al Aqsa Intifada borders, 29.4 support holding elections after the Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and 7.6% are against holding elections. Regarding participation in the general and local elections in case of holding them this year, the results indicated that there is high level of readiness to participate. 86.4% confirmed that they will participate in the general elections and 81.2% will take part in the local elections. In case of holding presidential elections only, 74.6% showed readiness to participate while if it were parliamentary elections only, 71% will participate.

The political system and oversight

This poll clarified that 37.5% support having a presidential system in Palestine, 22.1% support having a parliamentary one, 35.6 are in favor of a mixed system and 4.7 are undecided. Concerning the mechanism to be used for the presidential selection, 92.1% are in favor of direct elections by the people, 6.9% support selection of the president by the parliament and 1% are undecided. Regarding the number of times a president can be elected, 44.1% are in favor of having a president elected only once, 47.3% are with electing him/her twice in a row maximum and 8.6% hold other views. The results also showed that 59.6% think that supervision on the elections should be managed locally, from the villages and the parties participating in the elections, 23.9% support supervision from the Arab countries, 26.8% called for non-Arab Islamic supervision and only 32.9 % were in support of having international supervision.

Impartiality and reform

22.7% believe that all parties will have the same degree of freedom in conducting their electoral campaigns, 61.4% disagreed and 15.9% were undecided.

Regarding the Palestinian population's belief in the impartiality of the next elections, the results were as follows: 20.1% said "yes", 38% said "kind of", 24.8% said "no", and 17.1% said "I don't know."

In Gaza, the results were as follows: 21.3% replied with "yes", 35.3% with "kind of", 23% with "no" and 20.4% with "I do not know". In the West Bank 17.4% replied with "yes", 39.5% with "kind of", 25.8% with "no" and 15.3% with "I do not know".

Concerning if the general elections (presidential and parliamentary) were an instrument for overcoming the current political crisis, the results showed that: 40.4% replied "yes", 42.9% "no" and 16.7% "I do not know". In the Gaza Strip 45.1% replied "yes", 34.1%

“no” and 20.8% “I do not know”. In the West Bank 37.8% replied “yes”, 47.8% “no” and 14.5% “I do not know”.

Regarding the people’s belief in the elections’ role in reform, 38.9% replied “yes”, 35.5% “kind of”, 18.8% “no” and 6.8% “I do not know”. In the Gaza Strip 40.9% replied “yes”, 39.2% “kind of”, 13.7% “no” and 6.2% “I do not know”. In the West Bank 37.7% replied “yes”, 33.5% “kind of”, 21.6% “no” and 7.1% “I do not know”.

As far as the priorities of the electoral program as favored by the Palestinian population are concerned, the results showed that: 30.8% support struggle against Israel, 10.9% support an economic developmental program, 46.6% support reform and fighting corruption, 5.7% support a social program and enhancing democracy and 6% gave other answers. In the Gaza Strip, the results were: 28.9% support struggle against Israel, 10.2% support an economic developmental program, 54.8% support reform and fighting corruption, 4.7% support a social program and enhancing democracy and 1.4% are gave other answers. In the West Bank, they were: 31.9% support struggle against Israel, 11.4% support an economic developmental program, 42% support reform and fighting corruption, 6.2% support a social program and enhancing democracy and 8.5% gave other answers.

Women marginalized in history

Arabic libraries are full of historical books which disagree on many things but are united in their marginalizing of women and their view and considering women as a minor component in building culture. In this article we will shed some light on the reasons behind this attitude.

Novelist Zaki Elie says that history has not been fair to Arab women, and to Palestinian women in particular. The home has been considered to be the only appropriate place for women. But these obstacles did not stop women from playing an active role in history. There are many examples of women who made great sacrifices while challenging the British occupation, such as Fatima Ghazal who was killed in 1936. Mr. Elie says that it is clear that women are treated as followers in most history books, but this did not stop them from creating the Palestinian women’s movement.

Families torn apart

Aziza Nofal

In the aftermath of the first Palestinian catastrophe in 1948, when the state of Israel was created on top of a demolished Palestinian society, a large segment of the native Palestinians were expelled and became refugees, while another segment stayed on their lands to face their destiny.

Those who stayed in their homes became known as Arab Israelis, dividing the Palestinian nation into two parts. It took Israel 20 years to occupy the rest of Palestine, while maintaining the division between the Palestinians by giving each part different rights and restrictions.

This political reality did not stop Palestinians from being one people, mixing and marrying. This phenomenon was a source of concern for the state of Israel.

Um Nabil from Nablus speaks of her experience: “My son got married to a woman from Nazareth only six months before the current Intifada. He lived in her city as he was working there. My son and his wife used to visit us in the West Bank twice a week.”

Unfortunately, this was soon changed after the Intifada, as commuting became almost impossible. It was only possible for them to visit every six months as the Israeli government made it practically impossible for them to visit Nazareth. Um Nabil remembers when the couple’s first baby was born and she wanted to visit him but could not; Nablus was under curfew and a security siege was imposed around the West Bank. Her son and his wife were not allowed, from their end, to enter Nablus.

Another humanitarian tragedy is the story of Mr. Abu Asa’d, who was separated from his family for 20 years. He was living in Jordan, while his wife and children were in Jerusalem. Finally he was granted a permit to visit his family. In one of his visits to his family, the Israeli soldiers confiscated his papers and put him in prison and then asked him to present his papers to prove his right to come to his city.

According to Israeli sources, more than 2300 Palestinians were arrested while living with their families in Israel. Detention and deportation mean splitting the Palestinian families along the separation borders.

Bassam Mahdawi, 32, from Tulkarm, got married in 1998 to Maha, 31, from Kalanswa. They lived together in Kalanswa and started a legal struggle to obtain the necessary papers. The Israeli Ministry of Interior refused to issue the papers and expelled the husband to the other side of the Green Line. Maha said, “I stayed in Kalanswa to preserve my right to live in my town, joining my husband on the other side of the border would mean giving up my right to live in my town”. Maha kept visiting her husband on a weekly basis until the Israelis blocked the roads.

Suha Qadi is a woman from Jerusalem who has been married to a Palestinian from the West Bank for three years. She applied to obtain the family unification status but the papers were never issued. “I don’t know what to do, how to survive - my children are asking about their father who lives only 15 kilometers away but cannot see them.”

These cases are just a sample out of about 22,000 families waiting for an Israeli judgment.

