

**The Voice of Women**  
**Issue no. 128**  
**20 September 2001**

**In this issue:**

**Editorial: We need to take a courageous stand!**

**On the First Anniversary of the Intifada: What is the role of women?**

**437 Palestinian children have become permanently disabled**

**Palestinian women refuse a "Limited Right of Return to Palestinian Refugees"**

**Palestinian women finding creative economic solutions**

**Elderly women and ambulances prevented from passing Al-Mawasi checkpoint**

**Afraid to come home**

**Editorial: We need to take a courageous stand!**

With the Palestinian Intifada entering its second year, it has become clear that the only aim of the Israeli authorities is to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure, including the bodies of the Palestinian Authority, and target political leaders, innocent civilians, children and homes. This reality demands an immediate and courageous response from Palestinian. A clear stand must be taken at both the highest political level and the grassroots level.

Concerning the political level, the Palestinian Authority and the various political parties and factions must unite their efforts to create a National Unity Government, since Israel has, without hesitation, established one for itself. Unity is of the utmost importance given the silence and indifference of Arab leaders towards the Palestinian question. At the grassroots level, higher committees could be established, representing all Palestinian sectors. These committees could guide and support the Palestinian nation at a time in which all players consider the Intifada as the last hope for ending the occupation and achieving self-determination for the Palestinian nation.

The anniversary of the first year of the Intifada must be utilized as an opportunity to take a stand as a nation with a clear vision and strategy for the future.

**On the First Anniversary of the Intifada:**

**What is the role of women?**

**Ahmad Saleem, Ramallah**

On the occasion of entering the second year of the Intifada, *Voice of Women* interviewed several women from different social sectors. The questions posed focused on evaluating the Intifada and women's role in it.

Seema, Hadeel Wahdan, Sawsan Saleem, Hiba 'Ali and Ahlam Naser, who are either employees at various organizations or university students, all shared the views that:

- Women's role during the Intifada has deteriorated due to the militaristic aspect of the Intifada
- The choice not to initiate popular committees, as was done in the first Intifada, has decreased women's role
- The participation in the Intifada has been confined to one sector of society, namely young men and political leaders. The Intifada is the only means for a just solution, not 'peaceful negotiations at the highest political level.
- The Intifada has once more highlighted the Palestinian question and reframed it properly as dependent on national struggle rather than good faith in the Israeli government
- The lack of initiative taken on the part of the Arab countries has again proven their unreliability
- Women's role must not be underestimated: many young women have volunteered with the Red Crescent Society and have provided emergency medical services to those injured in popular demonstrations and confrontations with the Israeli military forces.

Four women political leaders and activists were also interviewed. Following is a brief summary of their responses.

*Ms. Nahla Qura: Political Activist with Fateh and Director of the Cultural Department at Ramallah Municipality:*

- Women's role in comparison with the first Intifada has taken a different form due to the following: (1) In the current Intifada, confrontation with Israeli military forces has been confined to certain areas, unlike the first Intifada where every Palestinian city, village, refugee camp, street and neighborhood became a line of confrontation. (2) The current Intifada has adopted a militaristic approach, thus confining it to a specific sector of society. (3) The Palestinian Authority and its organizations have taken over some of the roles which women played in the first Intifada.
- The lack of representation by women in the highest levels of political leadership has led to them playing a diminished role.

*Ms. Rabiha Diab: Director of the Association of Women's Committees for Social Work:*

- The role of women has not deteriorated; but is the nature of the Intifada itself and the degree of public participation which have changed.
- Women play both domestic and national roles, along with their professional roles.
- The Israeli closure has limited women, especially rural women, from participating in public activities.
- Women have a role in developing the sense of patriotism in their children.
- The role of women becomes apparent when their husbands are either killed or imprisoned.
- Internal national unity is crucial to achieving victories on national and political levels.

*Dr. Faiha Abdulhadi: Director General at WATC, Member in the Palestinian National Council:*

- She questions the assumption confrontation with the Israeli forces is the only definition of "struggle," and suggests that struggle takes different forms, and not only militaristic ones.
- Women are participating everywhere in a range of activities, but the media has not adequately covered their participation.

*Ms. Maha Nassar: Director of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees:*

- Palestinian women have been active participants on different levels. They have participated in national events, demonstrations and sit-ins, in addition to some military operations, and have sometimes faced prison as a result.
- In terms of the media, women have played an important role in conveying to the world the nature of Israeli oppression and discrimination.
- In the era since the creation of the Palestinian Authority, the women's movement has focused primarily on social and cultural aspects of life, leaving the political aspects aside for a number of years. This has held back women's political participation. The social, national and political levels are interwoven and must be always addressed as a whole.
- Although women's have played a lesser role in the current Intifada, the media has not portrayed this role fully.

**437 Palestinian children have become permanently disabled:  
Why are they deprived of their education?  
I'tidal Qneita, Gaza**

Four hundred and thirty-seven Palestinian children have become permanently disabled as a result of bullets shot by Israeli military forces. Thareef Abdulfattah, Yaser Nasr Siam, and 'Ammar Sa'eed Abu Rayyash, all teenagers, have been left disabled as a result of shots to their spinal cord or their chests. Thareef has coped with his disability within the confines of his home. His wheelchair allows him to manage his everyday necessities at home. Yaser, however, who is now a paraplegic, cannot leave his bed due to his critical condition. 'Ammar has become fully paralyzed.

These boys all expressed the feeling that participating in school and getting an education is the only way they can be reintegrated into society again, with the support of their classmates. However, education for them has become almost impossible, due to schools' lack of preparedness to receive disabled children. The parents of these children have all expressed their dissatisfaction with school principals and teachers who, instead of helping the child victims of Israeli aggression, try to avoid responsibility by referring parents to other schools and being unwilling to find ways to accommodate these children.

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with UNICEF and the teaching staff at targeted schools, is working to make things easier for disabled children. Emergency committees have been established which visit the disabled wherever they are, at home or in hospital, and conduct school examinations for them. Further, since most schools are not handicap-accessible, the Ministry has decided that all new schools must be equipped with facilities for the disabled.

All of these children carry a deep sense of sadness, anger and of loss. If their schools refuse to accept them and facilitate their education, they may lose hope. They deserve to be respected both as human beings and as the courageous heroes of our Palestinian nation.

**Palestinian women refuse a "Limited Right of Return to Palestinian Refugees"**  
**Dunia Al-Amal Ismail, Gaza**

Mashriqiyyat Organization has conducted public opinion poll including 338 women of eighteen years of age and older from nine regions in the Gaza Strip and representing various sectors of society. The women expressed the following views on the Right of Return.

Statement	Percentage
The right of return is an absolute irrevocable right.	76.9%
The right of return could be implemented on the ground.	50.9%
The right of return cannot be implemented on the ground.	24.2%
Couldn't assess whether the right of return could or couldn't be implemented.	23.4%
There should be limited right of return for some refugees to 1948 areas, integrating the rest into their host states.	Most women disagreed.
A solution for refugees' return must be addressed in one step.	66%
A solution for refugees' return could be achieved gradually.	33.1%
Refrained from answering whether a solution must be completed immediately or gradually.	0.9%
The basis on which UNRWA was established was humanitarian and political.	55.9%
The basis on which UNRWA was established was humanitarian only.	30.5%
The basis on which UNRWA was established was political only.	10.9%

**Palestinian women finding creative economic solutions**  
**Mirvat Sadeq, Palestinian Women Journalists Office, Nablus**

At a time when many Palestinian men have lost their jobs within Israel as a result of the deteriorating political situation, women's creative economic alternatives have solved numerous problems. One of the first initiatives implemented by women was the establishment of societies through which a group of women could gather sums of money and provide loans to members. This has helped women cover their children's school fees, weddings and setting up new homes. Another model for economic support that has been used by women is home economy and domestic food production. This helps women and Palestinian families maintain an adequate food supply without having to buy all food items and also has make it more feasible to boycotting Israeli products, fulfilling a national duty and supporting the domestic economy.

Women are producing and preserving yogurt, marmalade, pickles, juices, tomato paste, frozen and dry vegetables and fruits, olives and olive oil, wheat and seeds. They also weave baskets, sew clothes, and make embroidery and other handiwork.

Along with their husbands they have learned how to raise animals such as goats and cows in order to benefit from their product. They have also learned how to utilize any pieces of land available to them, and how to plant and harvest their crops on time. Often the food production projects exceed the family's basic needs, giving women the opportunity to sell some of their products and increase the family's income.

As far as social assistance for women, several loaning organizations exist which grant women loans to start small projects through which they provide income for their families.

### **Elderly women and ambulances prevented from passing Al-Mawasi checkpoint Ahlam Hammad, Gaza**

The Israeli blockade near Al-Mawasi in the Gaza Strip has turned people's lives into misery, pain and endless suffering. Um Ismail is an elderly Palestinian woman in her seventies who has lived in Al-Mawasi since 1948, when she became a permanent refugee. She suffers from chronic heart disease, but this apparently is not sufficient reason for the Israeli soldiers to allow her pass, in an ambulance, across the blockade. She was forced to walk 500 meters, leaning on the arms of medical staff, angry and hurting. Such is the treatment of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers. "Aren't the soldiers aware of my age and the seriousness of my condition?" she said angrily, "Where are principles of democracy and equality which Israel claims to follow?"

At this Israeli blockade, Palestinians are turned into numbers. Each person holding an identity card is given a certain number, which represents his/her pass to and from that area. This is a manifestation of apartheid because it prohibits those without a number from entering that area and thus isolates people within certain cantons. Many women are deprived of leaving that area to visit their parents and relatives, because they do not have numbers for their parents' areas of residence. Recently, Israeli authorities have also controlled the reparation and building of homes and access to basic materials and domestic necessities. This is evidence of Israel's desire to dehumanize and humiliate the Palestinian nation.

### **Afraid to come home Widad Al-Barghuthi**

Wafa' Yousef, the wife of 'Ahed Ghalameh who is on Israel's 'wanted' list, explains how difficult life has become and how uncertain and fearful she feels not knowing what tomorrow might bring for her, her husband and their three-year-old son. She can no longer concentrate when she's at work, wondering constantly where her husband is, if he's safe or if something bad has happened to him, especially considering the Israeli policy of assassination. It hurts her deeply when her child asks, "Where is 'Baba'? Why isn't he home yet? Why doesn't he come back? What's happened to him?" He is too young to understand what it means to be wanted by the Israeli authorities, too young to accept his father's absence, and too young even to remember his father's face after a long time of absence. One time when her husband returned after a long absence, her son wanted nothing to do with him, saying this wasn't his father. He wanted his real father!

What an agonizing situation this family is in, knowing that at any moment Wafa' could be left a widow, or the wife of a prisoner, all alone with her son who does not understand completely what is happening. She is now responsible for everything regarding the home, raising her son and

taking care of his education, in addition to her job at the Ministry of Culture. Her husband used to provide her support with so many of these things, but now she is all alone.