

**Voice of Women**  
**Issue no. 125**  
**August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

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**Editorial: Our voice shall always exist!**

Six years have passed since the first issue of *Voice of Women* was published. Over the years, this biweekly news supplement has played an important role in raising the public's awareness of women's issues and in contributing to the development of a democratic society, based on equality, justice, law, and full principles of citizenship.

Important issues related to women and all forms of discrimination against them have been explored from a range of economic, social, political, ideological and especially women's perspectives. The main topics that have been addressed were:

- Women and decision-making
- Domestic violence and violence against women
- Cultural and historical bases for discrimination against women in employment

Since the outbreak of the Intifada, *Voice of Women* has also addressed the suffering of women that has resulted from Israel's aggression against the Palestinian nation. This has most often taken the form of sharing the stories of women suffering from high levels of depression resulting from the loss of their husbands, brothers, sons or relatives. It has also highlighted women's roles in creating security for their families and providing for their livelihood and safety at a time these basic needs of life are not easily obtained and people's very homes are under constant attack and in some cases destroyed. *Voice of Women* will always echo with untold stories and the expression of social and political realities.

**Women suffer pangs of hunger at the Department of Social Affairs**  
**Ahmad Saleem, Ramallah**

Despite the tight closure around Palestinian villages and cities, dozens of women manage somehow to get to the Department of Social Affairs in Ramallah, hoping to finally be given their financial benefits. These women are either housewives, whose husbands are left unemployed due to the political circumstances, or the wives of martyred, injured or imprisoned men. But waiting for long hours every day on the steps of the Department is proving to be of no benefit to them, because their long-awaited payments are still not granted to them, their cases endlessly postponed by the Ministry of Finance. Most of them haven't received a penny for six months even though each woman bears the responsibility of feeding and caring for many children who are desperately awaiting their mothers' return with something in their hands.

Mr. Abdallah Al-Hurani, General Director of the Information and Studies Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, explains that the aim of the Ministry is to support poor and compromised families by improving their living standards. Families are chosen according to specific criteria. The minimum amount awarded per month is 100 shekels and the maximum is 400 shekels. This is too little to support a whole family; nevertheless, it is still of benefit to the poor. Mr. Al-Hurani added that an emergency plan must be put in place to cope with such circumstances and cases; after our long history as a nation of such crisis we should be better prepared.

### **Women political prisoners cry for help but there is no answer** ***Voice of Women, Nablus***

Palestinian women political prisoners have been subjected to extreme violations of human and prisoners' rights. They have been brutally tortured, attacked and deprived of their basic rights as prisoners. As a result, they decided to begin a hunger strike last month, Israeli prison officials responded to with extreme brutality and aggression. Palestinian women prisoners are held in cells with Israeli criminal prisoners who often convicted for prostitution or drug-related crimes and who frequently threaten and sometimes harm the Palestinian women prisoners.

It is worth mentioning that the number of Palestinian women political prisoners in Israeli jails has increased from four to nine since September 2000. Eight of them are held at "Nevi Tertsia" prison and one is undergoing interrogation at "Al-Maskubiyyeh" prison. Three of them are minors, beneath the age of eighteen. According to personal experiences from prisoners themselves and attorneys, the following measures are taken against Palestinian prisoners to restrain and silence them:

- Expropriating their clothes, televisions and radios
- Isolating them in solitary cells
- Depriving them of their daily break where they can see each other
- Depriving them of food and books
- Forbidding any family visits or contact with the outside world, especially those prisoners who have children
- Implementing criminal regulations and treating them as criminal prisoners
- Refusing to treat them as a collective group or as political prisoners

- Refusing to grant them their right to representation

**Violence against women is increasing:  
It's time to realize that we have a serious social problem  
Voice of Women, Gaza**

In a study conducted by the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza with married women (including divorced and widowed women) between the ages of 15 to 49, the following results were found:

- 42% of women believe there is a need to educate men as to women's rights as human beings in order to eliminate discrimination against women
- 26.8% of women do not believe that educating men would effect a change
- Husbands represent the category most like to use violence. There is a positive correlation between the closeness of the family relationship and the incidence of violence
- As unemployment rates increase, so does violence. 91.9% of women agreed to this.

The following recommendations were made:

- It is important to treat violence against women as a social phenomenon and refuse to allow it to stay confined within the walls of the "private" home
- Special shelters must be established for victimized women
- Special committees must be formed within the justice system to draft new legislation to protect women from violence
- Social workers need training to effectively assist victimized women
- The police must treat complaints of violence against women with greater seriousness

Women are subjected to different types of violence:

- Psychological and emotional : 51.5%
- Physical: 46.2%
- Sexual: 14.2%
- Social: 13.5%
- Economic and financial abuse: 5.2%

Women's responses to violence:

- Leaving their homes: 12.2%
- Remaining silent and feeling weak: 22.2%
- Dialogue with family (reported to be ineffective): 24,4%

**Hundreds of Young Women Support their Families Financially for Ten Months  
Amin Abu-Wardeh, Al-Najah Lil-Sahafah, Nablus**

The deteriorating political situation that began more than ten months ago has left thousands of Palestinians unemployed, especially those who used to work within Israel.

Women and young girls, working in sectors such as education, nursing, or business have come to the rescue of their unemployed family members, despite their low incomes.

Many researchers and social workers have noted this role played by women, which can easily be confirmed just by taking the morning bus from Kufur Qillil to Nablus City, because two-thirds of the passengers are women.

This phenomenon is not only confined to refugee camps and villages but also exists in cities. Ms. Nadia Abu-Zaher, a journalist at the Palestinian Legislative Council, fears that employers will abuse women's capacities given their desperate situation, violating basic rights and income laws. Researchers Mr. Ahmad Abu Ayesh and Mr. Nael Musa point to the importance of women's role in carrying responsibility for their family's livelihood, especially in this difficult period of time. They believe that women's contribution to supporting their families is preventing more severe deterioration of the economic situation and increase of poverty rates.

These women breadwinners are evidence of women's importance to both family and society, who expect them to carry these responsibilities competently.

### **Twenty years later, Suad passes her high school exams Lubna Al-Ashqar, Palestinian Journalist Group, Nablus**

After having left academic life twenty years ago, Suad Misleh, from Al-Zawyeh village in the Salfet District, has passed her High School Secondary Education Examination.

In 1981, while attending 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she was forced to leave school for several reasons. Two of her brothers were arrested by the Israeli soldiers and given lifetime prison sentences. As a result, her brother's house was demolished, leaving his family homeless and scattered. This situation caused her immense distress and she eventually left school. Another reason, however, was the fact that the only school in her village was coeducational. Her family didn't feel it was appropriate for her, as a girl, to attend a mixed school, and this contributed to her finally dropping out.

However, Suad continued to feel that education was important, and took advantage of every opportunity to attend training courses and workshops on topics such as housekeeping, first aid, health education, sewing, communication skills, applied arts, agricultural counseling, women's training, computers and languages. She also obtained a driving license. She was politically very active as well, and became a member of Fateh party and a number of other unions and committees. Despite all the training courses and experience she had gained, she felt that getting her high school examination certificate was still important, especially because of the respect with which it is treated by society. At last she decided to take the challenge despite numerous obstacles, such as the Israeli closure, her family's lack of believe in her capabilities and her domestic obligations. When she finally succeeded at the end of the year it was one of the happiest moments of her life, and for her family as well. She now intends to register at Al-Quds Open University to pursue a bachelor's degree.

**Palestinian women enter the world of computer maintenance and programming**  
**Amin Abu Wardeh, Women and Family Affairs Center, Nablus**

Today, it is becoming commonplace to find women working as computer maintenance technicians and programmers, because women have achieved remarkable success in taking their place in these "male" professions.

We spoke to several women who expressed their thoughts and feelings on this subject and describing their own experiences working as maintenance workers or programmers. Aziza Saleh, 24 years old, remembers how astonished customers used to be when they came to the company and found her, a woman, doing work with a screwdriver in her hand. Now, however, things are changing, and the number of women entering this field is increasing. Computer departments at universities and colleges are accepting hundreds of women every year.

Many researchers, engineers and lecturers have argued that these fields of study or work should not be confined to one sex. Rather, both men and women are capable of performing well in these fields, which require experience, competency, motivation and determination. Any human being willing to acquire these qualifications should be eligible for a job in these fields.

All women and girls who find themselves interested in these fields are encouraged to pursue their interests regardless of the difficulties they encounter in terms of social and family expectations. It is something worth fighting for, because in the long run, those who do will have the freedom to form their own identity and future.