

**Voice of Women**  
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**Bread and tea have become a delicacy**  
**64.3% of Palestinian families live beneath the poverty line**  
**'Itidl Qneita, Gaza**

Many Palestinian families have lost their primary breadwinners as a result of the current uprising, leaving countless stomachs hungry and families dreaming of the times when food and meat were a normal part of daily life.

"My children quarrel over a piece of bread, trying their best to grab as many pieces as possible to dip into their small cup of tea," says Um Juha, describing how terrible the situation of her family has become since her husband lost his job in Israel. "I've heard him crying when he's alone, grieving about his situation and blaming himself for not providing for his beloved children and family. I feel his anger and his anxiety growing daily," she says of her husband. Um Juha's family is suffering and deeply in debt, with no one to help them. The family of Bassam Balbeesy, an ambulance driver who was killed while trying to rescue Muhammad Al-Dura, is facing the same circumstances. Bassam's widow says that she, as the widow of a martyr, is "closely monitored by society, on the one hand, and obligated to fulfil my children's expectations, on the other. It kills me to hear my children repeating again and again that if their father were still alive, he would provide them with everything they ask for. How will I manage to provide for my eleven children, my mother-in-law and myself under these circumstances, when earning an income is almost impossible these days?"

Muhammad Miqdad, Head of the Department of Economics at the Islamic University in Gaza, considers the Israeli occupation the main cause for Palestinians' suffering. Israel has created a Palestinian economy fully dependant on the Israeli economy, and knows how to "punish" it by switching off their only source of living -- their job opportunities -- by imposing severe closures, enforcing what is in all respects an apartheid system. The

following are some statistics illustrating the suffering of Palestinians as a result of the Intifada:

- 64.3% of Palestinian families fall beneath the poverty line, 81.4% of which live within the Gaza Strip
- 10.7% of Palestinian families have lost their main breadwinners
- 49.2% of Palestinian families have lost more than half of their income
- The overall loss to the Palestinian economy is estimated at 5 billion US dollars

### **Children salvage toys from their demolished homes Al-Jeel Lil-Sahafeh, Palestine**

Israeli military forces have occupied many Palestinian homes close to Israeli settlements, setting up military positions on their roofs. Israel's pretext is to protect their Israeli settlers, but this practice results in an endless nightmare for Palestinians. Once they have taken over the houses, Israeli soldiers mount their machineguns from all sides of the rooves, shooting anyone they want, harassing the children and inhabitants of the occupied home, and brutally beating and terrorising men, women and children. Sa'id, a 24-year-old man, expressed his thoughts after being personally subjected to Israeli attacks and brutal beating and humiliation. He said, "Israeli soldiers are terrified, as if their heavy machineguns weigh nothing in the face of unarmed civilians! Their only relief is attacking, beating and even killing the victim, just to feel 'secure' and powerful."

Sara Abu-Khreis from Khan Younis, whose home was demolished on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2001, is now living in a tent on the site of her demolished home. Although the Ministry of Housing provided the Abu-Khreis family with the alternative of a small apartment, the fact that more than one family would be living together under one roof in the new apartment made it impossible for her. Instead she decided to live in a tent near the ruins of her home, despite the risks involved. Her children spend their days outside playing, or rather -- salvaging as many of their old toys as possible, buried under cement, dust and dirt. This is how Palestinian children live, this is how they learn to survive. Why is it that they have to experience such miserable lives, all for the sake of illegal settlers!

### **Field activities targeting youth are directed by the Young Women's Project**

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee, through its Young Women's Project, has implemented several education and empowerment courses this year which target the youth sector. A 21-hour training course on first aid and a 20-hour course on civil defence skills were offered in Khan Younis and Gaza. They aimed to provide young women with the skills to be able to take action and assist others in times of emergency or war without panicking. Another course teaching computer and internet skills was offered over a two-month period, beginning in March and ending mid-May. The course aimed to educate and empower young women and build their awareness of technological developments in order to participate effectively in society. In addition, a seminar entitled "Refugees and

the Right of Return" was held which was attended by fifty students from schools and universities. Mr. 'Abdallah Al-Hurani, President of the National Studies and Documentation Centre, discussed the right of return of all Palestinian refugees and the importance of continuing our struggle to achieve our goals. He stressed the important role the youth sector plays in reviving and maintaining the Palestinian historical memory and in passing it on to future generations. Further, in cooperation with the Health Counselling Sector in Rafah, cleaning campaigns were organised in Al-Zuhur Neighbourhood. Our field volunteers participated by organising home visits to increase people's awareness of the importance of a clean and healthy society. They distributed brochures and plastic bags carrying the slogan "For a Healthy and Clean Environment." Since the beginning of the Intifada, young women have participated in all political and national events including demonstrations, martyrs' funerals and protests.

**Efforts by the Ministry of Education to hold high school exams:  
Determined students challenge Israeli aggression and humiliation  
'Azeezeh Nofal, Nablus**

At a time when students should be focussed on studying for their final exams, and need a supportive atmosphere in order to concentrate well, high school students this year are severely distracted from their studies. Each day they are afraid they might not be able to get to their exams, and they lack the calm social and political atmosphere needed to follow a disciplined plan of study. Around 48,000 students are sitting for the final exams, the "tawjihi," this year despite the obstacles created by Israeli closure and terror. The Ministry of Education has made many efforts to ease matters, including:

- Preparing examination halls in additional locations
- Allowing students to sit for the exams at the nearest examination halls, in case of closure
- Creating a ministerial follow-up committee for immediate response in cases of emergency
- Maintaining constant communication with every hall to supervise the process
- Providing each hall with a health committee

Students have proved their determination, perseverance and readiness to defy all Israeli sanctions. With their pens and papers they stand strong against Israeli shelling, destruction and aggression.

**14 Students at Yanun School end a year of dangerous roads and settlers' attacks  
Shahnaz 'Abdul-Razzaq, Nablus**

About twelve young children, the eldest of them only eleven years old, struggle to reach their school in Yanun in fear of the surrounding settlers. They live in 'Ein Yanun and are forced to walk everyday to Yanun to reach their school, insisting on their right to education. Yanun is a small village of around 16500 dunums, with 115 inhabitants. Over the past years, Israel succeeded in isolating it completely from the surrounding

Palestinian areas, creating an enclave named Yanun surrounded by Israeli settlements. In every direction wire fences can be seen, surrounding the settlements. The only entrance to the enclave is a path which is dangerous on foot. Cars can pass through it only with great difficulty, which has forced many inhabitants to buy donkeys to transport them across the long distances. These children have seen very difficult times throughout the past year. They have been harassed by Israeli settlers, cursed at, and even attacked by wild pigs set free by the settlers themselves to terrorise Palestinians. Many families have left the village in search of greater security, and in this way have fulfilled the settlers' wishes and plans.

Yanun has only about fourteen students. First and second grade students are combined in one class, and third and fourth grade students in another. The school principal has tried to make it easier for students by providing a teacher in 'Ein Yanun to teach them over a period of three weeks until the situation improved. On the last day of school, the children's faces were happy and relaxed. One might think that this was because they were anticipating their summer vacation, as all children in the world do. But the cause for their happiness was that the principal and the teacher had offered to walk them back home on the difficult road through the mountains, taking a huge risk in an effort to make the children feel more secure and help them shed the trauma they have suffered throughout the past year.

**Sa'diyyeh Bakkir: Breadwinner for eleven mouths**  
**Women with small businesses caught between closures and bank obligations Judur**  
**Lil-Sahafeh, Gaza**

Sa'diyyeh Bakkir and Najah Shamali, two women living in the Gaza Strip, are the only breadwinners for their families since their husbands lost their jobs in Israel as the result of the political situation. Each day they pack up the bundles of clothes they have managed to buy, carrying them on their heads, and head off to Gaza's markets, crossing Israeli blockades and vast distances in the hope of selling enough to feed their hungry families.

Previous to the outbreak of the Intifada, the income of these women was just a supplementary income to their households, but now it has become the main source of income, barely providing the basic necessities. The deteriorating economic situation has caused loan organisations to set new regulations and conditions for loans, thus depriving many women of financial assistance. Many women are now unable to repay their loans due to the lack of income from their small, barely self-sufficient businesses. In response, loan organisations have decided to give loans to those women who own very small projects which are relevant to the current situation and are socially valuable, such as small grocery shops, selling clothes in markets and raising poultry. These projects are more likely to succeed regardless of the circumstances, resulting in a greater likelihood that the women will be able to pay back their loans.

**Rabi'a stabs an Israeli policeman in Jerusalem to  
avenge the hundreds of Palestinians killed by Israelis  
Nujud Al-Qasem, Nablus**

Rabi'a Kharyush, a 15-year-old girl from Nablus, was arrested by Israeli authorities for trying to stab an Israeli policeman in Jerusalem. She said her attempt came as a result of Israel's continuous massacres and attacks on Palestinians, especially children. She used to gather the pictures of all Palestinians martyrs in an album to honour them. Without telling any of her family members, she managed to save enough money to get to Jerusalem on her own. But before she could harm the policeman, the young child was put behind bars, in isolation. Her father, Muhammad Kharyush, declared that she had never mentioned wanting to stab an Israeli, and that she was too young to have such ideas. However, being a constant victim and seeing young children of her age being brutally killed by Israelis had impacted her childhood and brought her to a point where she felt compelled to act as she did in order to empower herself instead of constantly being a victim.

Her attorney, Sahar Fransees, stated that she has been kept in solitary confinement, allowed out once a day. She is permitted to contact her attorney and some friends. She was not interrogated because Israel has clear regulations regarding these kinds of charges. Her father is worried, fearing for his daughter's future. She is still very young, which causes her family great pain and suffering.

**Yaseen left for mid-day prayers and never returned  
'Itaf Yousef**

Hiba Rushdi, the twenty-year-old widow of martyred Yaseen Shihadeh and mother of a ten-month-old baby boy, finds comfort and relief in her orphaned son, who reminds her of his father. When Hiba and Yaseen met, they developed a great love and respect for each other. Every morning they used to walk along the same street, side by side, Hiba to school and Yaseen to work. Their love grew day by day and resulted in a warm and loving marriage.

However, the death of Yaseen's older brother, Ismael, who was killed by Israeli soldiers in 1998 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba, drew Yaseen into a continual state of grief and depression. He was known for his generosity and tenderness, his willingness to lovingly support and provide for his family, friends and neighbours and help them to find solutions for their problems. He supported his wife, helping her with domestic work such as washing the dishes, sweeping the floor and cooking. He cried along with his wife when she gave birth to their first and last son. He treated them both with great affection and respect.

One day, he woke up, kissed his little boy, and left to go to the mosque to pray the midday prayers. "I was playing with my 4-month old son, talking about his father, when

suddenly my sister-in-law's son entered without even knocking, with a strange look on his face. "I was shocked," she said with tears in her eyes. "My uncle has been shot," her nephew said, pointing to his chest. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing, and refused to believe it, because my husband had been shot several times before with light bullets, and always came home again." Visitors began coming to her door, trying to comfort her by saying that he was not seriously wounded and only had a light injury to his leg. They didn't know the truth, or refused to admit it. While demanding to go to the hospital to see her husband, Hiba switched on the television to hear the news, and saw the breaking news that Yaseen Shehadeh has been killed by Israeli soldiers. She immediately switched off the television, refusing to believe the fact.

Yaseen was shot with a spiral bullet in his chest, resulting in extensive internal injuries. He died from loss of blood while being held at an Israeli blockade and denied hospitalisation. Hiba was told that his last words before his death were, "send all my love to my family." With those words he gave up his soul, leaving behind a 20-year-old widow, a 4-month-old son, a loving family, and hundreds of devoted friends. Hiba is now living at her father's house where she finds the most emotional support, but she remains close to her husband's family.