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Editorial: Strategy and Excitement!

It is extremely dangerous to reach the point where the loss of a life, a paralyzing injury, a demolished home, a military closure, and militarized existence become "normal" images and experiences, overshadowing our days and nights. The danger lies in process of "naturalization", when we begin to hear, see, and talk about such matters in a matter-of-fact manner, devaluing human life and undermining the meaning of our existence.

Since the beginning of the Intifada, many Palestinian families have lost their main breadwinners, leaving enormous burdens on the family, especially on women. In an attempt to find a solution and to relieve affected families economically, there has been a proposal to return to depending more heavily on "home economies," a strategy that proved effective in the first Intifada. Yet, the question remains, why women are expected to initiate, manage, and sustain such a strategy when the efforts of the whole society needed to make it succeed and when all, not just women, benefit from it. Implementing such a strategy, therefore, needs massive national and individual support, without putting total responsibility on women alone. Although the nation's excitement about the idea of home economies is positive and healthy, implementing it needs a planned strategy supported by the Palestinian National Authority and the entire Palestinian community.

953 Homes demolished and shelled
Al-Jeel Lil-Sahafeh

Since the beginning of the Intifada, hundreds of Palestinian homes were destroyed and shelled by Israeli tanks, helicopters and bulldozers. Most demolished homes used to lie adjacent to Israeli illegal settlements, and thus their destruction was on the pretext of

"self-defense." However, the consequences of such acts are too far reaching to describe, as innocent Palestinian families, children, men and women were the victims. Hundreds of families became homeless. The image of tents built over wrecked homes, with few salvaged pieces of furniture, a pot and few cups has become a common sight lately in the Gaza Strip, Khan Younis and Rafah.

Families are rarely given notice by Israelis for the destruction of their homes, and thus are taken by surprise by the sounds of tanks and bulldozers outside the house. Children, as a result, lose their sense of security and safety, and for many of them fear and anxiety have become a daily norm. Many children suffer from involuntary urination, fearing the nights and the sleep in the cold, insecure, bare tents. Yet men and women whose homes have been destroyed have no alternative. If they were to leave their wrecked homes and look for a new place to live, where would they go? They insist on staying where they belong, having sworn they would never risk becoming refugees once again after the painful lesson of their refugee experience in 1948. Leaving one's land to secure one's body is a huge loss, and brings endless pain and suffering, including alienation and a sense of disintegration.

Palestinian mothers required to prove they are "not guilty" 'Itidal Qneita, Gaza

Hundreds of Palestinian men are serving lifetime sentences in Israeli jails for political reasons. The fact that their lives are already controlled and guided by Israeli laws does not seem to be enough for Israel, which extends its policies of humiliation, deprivation and dehumanization beyond the jail bars to affect the families, mothers and children of the imprisoned persons.

Over the course of several interviews with mothers of imprisoned Palestinians, it became evident that all mothers attempting to visit their children in prison are subjected to practices of extreme humiliation and invasive inspection. The mother of Ibrahim Barud, a prisoner, stated that women visiting their sons are carefully inspected by Israeli women soldiers, sometimes even forced to remove their clothes and stand naked, or open their mouths for inspection.. Such acts of humiliation are dehumanizing. To make matters worse, since the beginning of the Intifada, all visits to prisoners have been canceled on "security" pretexts. Even women in their seventies are deprived of visiting their sons for months and even years, accused of representing a "security threat" to the Israeli State. An 8-year-old girl is forbidden to meet her father, whom she has never met before. Here too, the issue of "Israeli security" is raised, without taking the feelings, longings and simplest human rights into consideration. What kind of threat does a 70-year-old old woman represent to the Israeli State, or an 8-year old girl for that matter? It is clear that security has nothing to do with it, it is mere humiliation, causing more suffering and mostly hurting the others.

Women workers: caught between Israeli oppression and their employer's greed

Shihnaz Abdul-Raziq, Nablus

As a result of the current deteriorating political circumstances, the economic situation has worsened, affecting everybody, especially women workers. Israel's closure of Palestinian villages, cities and towns makes transportation and movement of people almost impossible. Yet, women workers make every effort to reach their work places, regardless of how difficult it is or long it takes. This is the case for Nadia from the village of Beit Foreek, to the east of Nablus. Nadia is the only breadwinner for her family since her father's death. As a result, she is forced to struggle despite the siege to reach the sewing factory where she works. Israeli closure, however, isn't the only barrier or concern faced by workers; due to the siege and the bad economic situation employers tend to lessen the number of workers to compensate for the loss. As usual, women tend to be the first to be fired whenever circumstances are deteriorating.

In response, the Working Women's Society in Nablus initiated a program through which job opportunities are sought for these women, each according to her qualifications and skills. The Society has also supplied women with financial aid by cutting their employees' monthly wages by one paid day per employee and granting aid to needy women.

Support Councils Fida' Barghuthi

The Palestinian woman has always done her best to contribute and participate in the formation of the Palestinian social structure. She has played an effective and crucial part on all levels. Out of this was born the idea of initiating "Support Councils" or "Shadow Councils," through which women could influence decision-making, guarantee women's presence in organizations and institutions, and integrate gender-sensitivity and gender analysis into all aspects of national life.

In an interview with Sabha Ghanem, Project Coordinator of the Support Councils Project in Jenin, the following points were highlighted:

- The importance of using the term "Support Councils" rather than "Shadow Councils" when referring to this initiative, due to the dependency connotations of the latter
- The aim of this Project is to empower women to be part of decision-making and social reconstruction. In addition, to ensure gender-sensitivity in all decision-making matters, which tends to be ignored or overlooked by men in high positions
- The Project was launched in the Jenin, Nablus and Ramallah districts. It took the form of training women, as well as men, on accepting the idea of women's participation, enlightening them as to the role of local councils and the importance of civil service.
- Men within local councils initially rejected the idea of the "Support Councils." However once the Ministry of Local Governance took a decision to integrate women into "Support Councils," the idea started to be gradually accepted and even supported by those men, who began to realize the capacity and effectiveness of women in this role.

- Many women are ready to be part of these Councils. They have the qualifications and the readiness to do so.
- The Councils played a major role throughout the Intifada in providing assistance and training to children on different topics relevant to the current situation. They have also gathered information about the number of people injured, killed, and families harmed as a result of the Intifada.
- The main need of rural women is education. Financial and social considerations hinder women from pursuing their education, which creates an obstacle in women's development.

Shaima': Israel will never enjoy security until we get our rights
Laila Abu-Khader, Gaza

While there have been accusations of a lack of participation by women in the current Intifada, there are a number of women who believe in and wish to be part of military struggle against Israeli occupation. Shaima', a 20-year-old university student from Gaza stressed her willingness and readiness to undergo military practice and training in order to be part of a military struggle against occupation, if needed. Other women, within and outside of women's committees, regarded this matter as legitimate, since women and mothers have endured and suffered enormously, their own military participation would be unquestioned if attempted. They also addressed the compatibility between women's social role and their role in the national struggle against the occupation. One goes hand in hand with the other, they believe.

Israeli closure hinders rural women from selling their vegetables
Ahmad Saleem, Ramallah

Many Palestinian women in the Ramallah area typically bring the vegetables they have planted and harvested on their own land to sell in Ramallah's main produce market. After interviewing several elderly women sitting in front of baskets full of parsley, mint, onions, zucchini, thyme, cucumber and grape leaves, it became clear to what extent these women are suffering from the Israeli imposed closure. They described the difficulties they face in reaching the market, especially when they have to carry their baskets on their heads through valleys and mountains to reach the city. In addition, due to the over all deteriorating economic situation, sales are extremely low and thus a 70 Shekels/day sale before the Intifada does not go beyond a 40 Shekels/day currently. The age of these women ranges between 50 and 80 years, which means that almost all of them bear the responsibility of providing for their families in the villages and for their children. One woman stressed the fact that her attempt to enter the vegetable business came as a result of her family's desperate need to survive. Yet, with the closure tightening with every passing day, the hope of these women to sell and ensure their family's livelihood diminishes. Lifting the closure is the only way to grant these women their lives back.

Productive women in rural Jenin
Muhammad 'Azmuti, Jineen

Rural Palestinian women in Jenin are playing a major role in reducing their families' suffering and lack of necessities. They have been active in providing for their families once trained and given the opportunities to do so. Many governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Ministry of Agriculture, have supported projects aiming at assisting rural women by training them in pasture management, planting and home economy. Other training courses, such as leadership and counseling, are offered as well. Women were encouraged to enter emergency committees, and experience has proven that rural women's low levels of education do not stand as a barrier in their way of development. On the contrary, if given the chance and equipment they prove capable. Some women have even said that they are envied for their success and capability in producing needed supplies. Yet social traditions and customs still hinder women from achieving greater successes, and the social acceptance of women's involvement in production is in many cases granted only due to the desperate need for the income these women are able to bring in.