

Voice of Women
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New parameters to empower women in elections

WATC held three days of specialized training in Ramallah and Gaza, in collaboration with Frederich Ebert Stiftung. Twenty-eight women participated in the Gaza course and ten in the Ramallah course. The courses covered topics such gender, communication and networking with a focus on elections and women's participation.

Participants recommended amendments to the current Elections Law in order to be more equitable towards women, and urged the women's movements to develop mechanisms to influence decision-makers in this regard.

In another workshop on women's health, organized by WATC, participants discussed amendments to the public health law, particularly in the articles and provisions related to the health of a mother and child. Participants also focused on the importance of women's sustainable development and on their right to education, labor, personal safety and good health.

The workshop also tackled the issue of abortion from a social perspective and discussed the moral, religious, social and professional issues related to abortion. Participants agreed that girls or women who are the victims of sexual abuse are discriminated against because they do not have the right to abort. The participants recommended introducing articles that allow for abortion in such cases. They also proposed changes to the terms used in the law to make it more sensitive to gender.

Ramadan renews grief and increases financial suffering
Abdelbaset Khalat, Jenin

When the third part of the month of Shaban (the month preceding Ramadan in the Hegira calendar) started, people started preparing for the month of fasting morally, spiritually and nutritionally. However, the Palestinian Ramadan renews the cycle of grief.

Haja Marzouqa AlZarba'I from Gaza, has had four of her five sons martyred since 1948. She also recalls the story of the Abu Hein family, which had three members killed by the Israeli occupation. Haja Marzouqa spends her time gathering the stories of mothers who have lost their children in this conflict.

Um Sameer lives on the edge of Jenin City. There, the Israeli occupation regularly attacks entire families. The fast this year coincides with the anniversary of the first massacre committed in the city when five young men were killed while they were making breakfast.

Ahmad Ali, a businessman, says that the occupation has turned Ramadan into an ordinary month. It used to have a special atmosphere before the current Intifada, but now, "If we get read for the fact, the Israelis will use curfews to keep us from going anywhere. And when the curfew is lifted, the siege around the towns will remain just as severed. Pockets are empty and people haven't been able to store up food for this holy month; children are not encouraged to fast because they have not had enough to eat all year. The occupation has also destroyed the rituals of this month, replacing the old canon that used to announce the time of breaking the fast, with the canons of the tanks and missiles that explode at any time of the day or the night."

Women and Environment project continues Hiba Skeik, Majd Media Office, Gaza

Some may wonder how we can combine women and the environment in one project, thinking that environmental issues are exclusive to men alone. But in fact, men and women are both part of the environment.

The Women and Environment project, sponsored by WATC in collaboration with the Palestinian Hydrology Group, targets the marginalized areas and segments in the society; especially mothers and children. Fatma Skeik, project coordinator, said the project has an environmental dimension and a dimension about women. The activities include a summer camp for women and children. The project aims to integrate women in issues related to the environment and water by enhancing their participation in planning and implementation of the different aspects of the project. It also includes educational programs to raise the awareness of women, particularly those who are farmers. The project is funded by the World Bank and will be terminated in 2004.

Increasing birth rate in Palestine Mervat Ouf, Gaza

Although the Zionist state has used products in the Palestinian Territories which cause sterility, while bringing Jews from other parts of the world and settling them in Palestine, there is a sharp increase in birth rates in Palestine.

The Al Aqsa Intifada broke out in September 2000. In the same month, Al Hilou Hospital performed 241 therapeutic surgeries for infertility and in-vitro fecundation with a 26.6% rate of success.

Nonetheless, there has been an increase in miscarriages and premature birth during the Intifada because the occupation forces prevent pregnant women from crossing the checkpoints to hospitals. Many children have been martyred before they were born at the checkpoints. Mona, 24, lost her first baby at Abu Al Huli checkpoint between the northern and southern parts of the Gaza Strip.

Hajez Al Madmiah is the name that was given to an innocent child who was born at the checkpoint with that name. His mother said, "I will keep this name in my heart because it reminds me of the miracle of how my child survived the Zionist oppression."

Emergency medical staff: A story of dedication
I'tmad Nasrallah, Gaza

Although she had received practical training in first aid, her experience on the ground was far more educational. She has had to carry the bodies of martyrs, assemble body parts, transport the injured to hospitals, and work under fire, with bullets often targeting the ambulance.

Imtithal Hussein, 25, from Beit Hanoun, had a dream of studying nursing and first aid and her husband encouraged her to move forward.

Commenting on her work, she said, "Any person in this profession feels that the medical care and intervention in emergencies which they provide are still little compared to what the martyrs and injured have given to our homeland." As for the difficulties she faces as a woman, she said, "As a woman working in the field, you cannot avoid some curious looks by people who are still doubt women's ability to do such work. However, when I see that I have stopped the bleeding of a wound or gotten a patient to the hospital in time to save his life, these other issues seem insignificant."