



Annual Report 2005



**Women's Affairs Technical Committee
(WATC)**

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Introduction by Rose

Activities during 2005:

- I. Advocacy and Capacity Building for Reform**
Supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)
- II. Awareness for Equal Representation in PLC**
Sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- III. Empowerment of Women in Local Councils**
Supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- IV. Young Women Leaders: Community Awareness for Equality**
Sponsored by the Canadian Representative Office
- V. Empowerment of Young Women and Men Leaders**
Supported by DIAKONIA
- VI. Empowering Young Leaders for Democracy and Good Governance**
Supported by DIAKONIA
- VII. Sanabel: Empowerment of Rural Women**
Supported by the Ford Foundation
- VIII. Voice of Women:**
Supported by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
- IX. Networking**
- X. Staff development and Strategic planning**
- XI. Acknowledgements**

I. Advocacy and Capacity Building for Reform

Supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)

WATC's Advocacy and Capacity Building for Reform program has worked for nine years to enhance the participation of women in reform and nation building, by empowering women from different regions of Palestine for community leadership and advocacy, by ensuring that the principles of human and women's rights guide the drafting of laws and policies, and by working to unify the agenda and coordinate the efforts of organizations working to expand the national role of women.

Advocacy and mobilization

A. Monitoring and Amending Laws

WATC plays an active role in building consensus among organizations on advocacy to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), giving input from a gender-sensitive perspective on draft legislation and on the application of existing laws. Wherever debate arises within society or policy is being formed which can impact women's participation in society, WATC participates, including political life, education, right to employment, violence against women, legal age for marriage and emancipation, procedures for elections, party law, and the independence of the judiciary. WATC's legal consultants monitor gender issues during PLC meetings. WATC and its partners studied the following laws and drafted amendments which were submitted to the PLC, then followed by meetings with PLC members:

- **Election Law, number 9, 2005.** The PLC voted in favor of the proposed amendments, making the election process more inclusive by establishing mixed electoral lists (50% of nominations from districts and 50% from party lists), increasing the number of seats in the PLC from 88 to 132, establishing 28 as the age of eligibility for nomination, establishing a 20% quota for women for the party lists and mandating legislative and presidential elections every four years.
- **Local Council Elections Law, number 10, 2005.** The PLC initially voted for the proposed amendment making it compulsory for parties to include women in their lists, for at least 20% of local councils to be made up women, and for nomination lists to have at least one woman among the first three names, the following four names, and the remainder of the list. However, some communities objected, and the PLC reconsidered the law and made several amendments to article 17 on 27/8/2005, so that one women must be among every five names on the list, with at least two women serving in local councils with no more than 13 seats (local councils with less than 1000 voters are exempt). This was implemented in the third and fourth stages of local council elections; the final stage has been postponed.
- **Alimony Fund Law, number 6, 2005.** WATC, in cooperation with the Women's Center for Legal Counseling and the General Union of Palestinian Women, met with the Chief Justice to discuss the problems women face in collecting alimony, child support and other compensation after decisions by *sharia*' or church courts. In response, the Chief Justice established a fund from court fees that will be used for such support. The three organizations and the Chief Justice also prepared a draft law and involved the participation of many organizations. The final draft was approved by the PLC and sent to the President for ratification on 27/6/2005.
- **Palestinian Social Security Law.** The proposed amendments were approved, ensuring a fairer application of social security law for women, especially with regard to pensions and health insurance for widows, divorcees and unmarried women, as well as enhancing protection for the rights of women working in the public and private sectors.

- ***Independence of the Judiciary, number 15.*** The PLC passed the proposed amendments, further guaranteeing the integrity, independence and accountability of the judiciary before the law.
- ***Draft Palestinian Penal Law.*** Jordanian pena law number 16, 1960, was still in effect in the West Bank and in Gaza, the Palestine Penal Law number 74, 1936. WATC and partners met 25 times to draft recommendations, placing emphasis on the rights of women and children and general freedoms and congruence of the penal law with the Palestinian Basic Law and international conventions signed by the PLO. The draft law was passed by the PLC.
- ***Draft Palestinian Family Law.*** WATC and partners met 22 times to draft text establishing marriage as a contract between two sides with equal rights and obligations and as a full partnership between the husband and wife in the context of the family; 18 as the legal age of emancipation for a woman; application of the Family Law to all regardless of their religion, gender, color or race and consistent with international conventions against discrimination; freedom from religious regulations under the law; complete equality relating to personal statutes; equal rights in marriage, parenting, guardianship, and divorce, with equal division of assets acquired during the marriage, considering that work within the home and child care are productive work.

B: Advocacy for Reform

WATC held two conferences in which many organizations, political parties, funders and government representatives participated. The conference in Gaza was on reform, the role of the PLC and government policies towards women. Participants recommended that organizations provide greater support to women to attain leadership positions, work against corruption, promote PLC candidates who support reform, work for legislation consistent with international conventions on human rights, and mobilize advocacy groups for reform. The conference in the West Bank was on violence against women. The conference featured an interactive drama on early marriage, violence against women and discrimination which ended with a proposal for legislation for the protection of women **and a final vote by the PLC??**. Recommendations were to mobilize professionals to treat victims of abuse, to work with youth to challenge dominant beliefs which perpetuate violence against women, to maintain contact with women in crisis, and to conduct further research on the phenomenon of violence.

Networking and Mobilizing Support

A. Networking to Mobilize Support for Legal Amendments

WATC networked actively during 2005 to formulate policies, develop vision and influence members of the PLC and other decision makers. Relationships with the Chief Justice (resulting in the Social Security Fund Law) and the Supreme Fatwa Council (which deals with *fatwas* and Islamic *sharia*) were strengthened significantly, with a noticeable shift in the attitude of the Chief Justice's staff from viewing women's demands as motivated by the west, to seeking input from women's organizations on draft legislation and taking a stand against violence against women.

B. Networking for Reform. WATC played a major role in several networks:

A coordinating committee of thirteen civil institutions focused on reform for greater transparency and integrity. The Forum of Palestinian Civil Organizations Against Violence against Women met 46 times, published statements in the media, held workshops, festivals and protests, met with the families of victims, and worked to protect women. “Honor killing” was a focus (27 girls and women were killed during 2005) and WATC collected data from police and government sources which the forum used to advocate for tougher legislation on this issue. The National Campaign to Promote the Participation of Women in Elections National Campaign worked actively with the Central Elections Committee, the monitoring committee, and political parties to expand the role of women in elections, train women candidates, and advocate for the inclusion of women on party lists.

Training

A. Training Potential Women Candidates for Elections

WATC offered eight 3-hour training sessions on skills for communication and media work for 113 prospective women candidates during the second phase of local council elections. Eight of these women nominated themselves for the local council elections and five won. Coordinators worked with the Central Elections Committee to increase the participation of women in the elections and many women candidates joined the monitoring teams.

B. Training Potential Women Leaders

Although 660 women applied for the training, the budget could only accommodate 102. Women of different ages, educational levels, and from different areas were selected, with consideration for their commitment to personal development and social change. The 17 sessions focused on leadership skills for capacity-building and raising social consciousness, including principles of democracy, citizenship, social justice and equality, confidence and public speaking, campaign management, gender issues, conflict analysis, and election procedures. Six trainees from each of the four districts were selected for a special leadership training session, *Leading to Choices*, which was supported by **Women’s Learning**. About 30 participants joined the committee to monitor the legislative elections. Thirteen trainees nominated themselves for local council elections and 10 won. Six sought nomination within their political parties for Legislative Council elections in January 2006, and three succeeded in being listed.

“I never thought before that I had the right or the ability to go to my children’s school and ask about their progress; now I go and ask about them, and I can engage in social and political discussions because I have the confidence and the ability to know what is happening around me.”
- Participant in training

C. Training and Mobilizing Advocacy Groups

Seventy-five men and women from women’s organizations and political parties, as well as lawyers, journalists and employees from civil society were organized into regional committees. During the workshops on the draft Penal Law and Personal Statutes, members were empowered to present papers and proposals advocating their views.

Social awareness and follow-up



Social awareness meetings were held for women who had not received training to discuss laws affecting women and children, “honor killing,” and proposed amendments to the election laws. Regional follow-up groups met 40-64 times to teach reading law from a gender perspective and to mobilize for political participation and leadership.

Role of the media in mobilization

WATC issued statements on issues such as election laws and violence to gain public support and to influence decision makers, and WATC’s activities were reported by almost all the local media. WATC’s biweekly newspaper supplement, *Voice of Women*, highlighted women’s rights, reform issues and amendments to the draft laws. WATC produced one play with Sanabel Theater in Jerusalem, dealing with violence against women and early marriage, and another, with Ashtar in Ramallah, which involved the audience in considering the Penal Law’s role in violence against women, especially honor killings. WATC’s radio series, *Against Silence*, reached those in isolated areas with 50 episodes on reform, elections, and violence and discrimination against women. The goal through these different media was to reach as many people as possible in different geographical areas.

Unexpected achievements

In response to the high level of interest in the project, WATC established a new group with women from the villages around Hebron. They participated in a number of WATC activities, including a series of six meetings about violence against women and women’s rights in elections and two days of training on human rights. At the request of local women's centers in Taybeh (near Ramallah) and Al Muwasi (Gaza), WATC’s held several meetings about children's and women's rights and domestic violence. The participants responded with tremendous enthusiasm and demonstrated greater confidence and desire for further involvement after the meetings.

II. Awareness for Equal Representation in PLC

Sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

This project was launched on November 1st, 2005 with the goal of reducing the gender gap in the political arena and increasing women's participation and representation in the elections, especially in the Palestinian Legislative Council, realizing the equal rights of women set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Basic Law. The project seeks to educate the public about the importance of women's participation in decision making, the right of women to be nominated and elected, the new mixed electoral system and its role in making the elections more democratic as well as to educate decision makers and political parties about the importance of including women in their lists with a minimum representation of 20%. The project also seeks to increase the participation of women voters in the elections, support women running for office - especially PLC candidates -- in leading effective campaigns, and develop the skills of women in the legislature to be able to contribute effectively.

Raising awareness

Women. Meetings were held in seven communities in West Bank and three in Gaza to educate women on the amended elections law for the Palestinian Legislative Council and the new procedures for elections.



Political Parties. Ten meetings were held with political parties in Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, Jenin and Bethlehem, and four were held in Gaza. These meetings were effective in securing the commitment of the eight political parties in the Palestinian Liberation Organization to promote the participation of women at decision making levels within the parties and as PLC candidates. The parties raise the problem women face of being required to resign from their current jobs in order to run for election, with no guarantee of employment by the parties if they do not win. While all the parties had women on their lists as mandated by the law, none had listed a woman as the first candidate despite the fact that some of their women members were experienced legislators and community leaders. Further work with political parties is planned and follow up will continue after the PLC elections.



Meeting with political parties in Jerusalem

Media. One theatre performance about women's participation in the PLC was held in Gaza, followed by a lively discussion with the 150 women who attended. Preparations were made for the play to be performed in the West Bank in January 2006. WATC began work on a documentary about five women legislators who have made significant achievements and started preparations for four TV talk shows. Two will address nominated PLC candidates prior to the elections and the other two will be done after the elections.

Training

Sixteen women running for seats in the PLC attended WATC's 16-hour course on Management of Election Campaigns. The training focussed on developing skills for publicity work, using media to address voters, diplomacy, public speaking and interviews. Participants were videotaped and given the opportunity to improve their delivery with feedback from other participants and the facilitator.

III. Empowerment of Women in Local Councils

Supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

WATC, in partnership with *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, entered a new phase in its work to empower women local council members in the West Bank and Gaza by equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed for effective leadership. Based on a needs assessment conducted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, WATC and other organizations selected women who had won seats in the local councils during the first two phases of elections in Tulkarem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Qalqilya and Salfet Governorates and Gaza to participate in training.

In Gaza, a five-day training workshop was conducted on networking, gender reading of budgets, advocacy, management, fundraising, report writing, time management and meeting facilitation. Twelve council women from the first phase of elections participated in the first training, and it was offered again to eight women who won in the second phase of elections. A final five day training was held for 23 women elected in both phases on integration of gender in development, lobbying and negotiation. In

the West Bank, a workshop on gender analysis, communication skills, media and management skills was offered to women who won seats in the first and the



Training women members of local councils in the Qalqilya area

second phases of local elections. The training was given three times in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Tulkarem. In Nablus, twelve council women received five days of training in Nablus in communications and leadership skill, media skills, gender analysis, and management, and four days of training in proposal writing and fund raising, and this training was offered again to fourteen women in Qalqilya. In Jenin and Ramallah a five day training program on proposal writing and fund raising was given.

Achievements of the project:

- The project helped 82 women local council members to develop their administrative and management skills, their knowledge of women's rights and how to defend them, their assertiveness and their leadership style.
- The project bridged the ideological gap between different council women and facilitated their access to WATC.
- In Gaza Strip, council women formed an active networking committee for sharing of strategies and to assist each other with problem solving.
- More than 20 women from local councils participated in radio talk shows on women in local councils, women and the Legislative Council, and women's political participation.
- Attitudes and perceptions of participants towards the role of women shifted, especially those of Hamas council members, resulting in greater support for change and for progress towards equal rights for women.
- Some council women who had formerly dismissed the role of civil society organizations began to work for cooperation between WATC and the women's departments in the local councils.

- Stronger partnership and coordination between WATC and the ministries of Local Government and Women's Affairs, reducing duplication of training programs and conserving resources.

IV. Young Women Leaders: Community Awareness for Equality

Sponsored by the Canadian Representative Office



WATC worked with 150 young women and men to conduct a community awareness campaign about equality in law and elections. Participants were trained in human rights, legal rights, and gender equality in legislation and equipped to apply their skills in conducting advocacy and awareness campaigns. WATC sought by organizing young leaders from different youth and women's organizations to build towards a unified agenda on women's representation and roles in national reform, including in legislation and elections as well as to stimulate debate at the community level on women's issues and rights and motivate young women and men to participate in the advocacy and awareness campaigns in their communities. Participants were selected from 39 sites representing 4 districts in the West Bank and Gaza. The project was completed in June of 2005.

Ahmad, from Ramallah, is a graduate of the National Institute for Technology and remains unemployed. During the project, Ahmad became very involved working with youth organizations. He established a forum for young artists (poets and writers) and works on producing a newsletter for youth. Ahmad started to see the importance of the role of women and changed his attitude and perception towards them.

Expanded project

Several changes were made to the scope of the project. Because the trainings proved so popular, the project was expanded to include 150 participants instead of 100. Trainees from the first group recruited new participants. We also decided to expand the target group to include young men in the regions where mixed groups are tolerated. We also selected participants from 39 sites to bring the debate on women's issues to a larger number of local communities. In addition, we were able to offer 5 times as many trainings as originally planned because our costs were dramatically reduced by trainers volunteering their services for free and host organizations allowing us to use their training facilities free of charge. Fifteen young women and men from the Tulkarem and Ramallah districts attended 28 hours of training on Lobbying and Advocacy.



Youth-led campaigns

Due to all of these factors, the participants were able to conduct three campaigns instead of one, on the following themes of their choosing:

Fatima, from Tulkarem, is a student at the Arab American University. She gradually overcame her shyness and participated more confidently in the project. She said, "This project provided me with skills that are very important. It made me think about many issues. My vision now is to make a difference in the lives of other young women. I am planning to do something to advance the role of young women in the university. I feel that we have a lot to give, but need someone to encourage and guide us."

1. **Tulkarem and Ramallah Campaign: Unemployment and Equal Opportunities for Youth.** The youth organized a forum on unemployment among youth, with the participation of many women's organizations, youth institutions, and representatives of government. The forum addressed the

roles of the public and private sector in remedying unemployment among youth. The participants worked together to draft a law titled Protection Against Unemployment. A debate was started between the youth leaders and the members of the PLC. WATC committed to continue to work with the PLC, the Ministry of Labor and senior staff from other relevant ministries towards legislation guaranteeing equal treatment. Many activities were organized on this issue and the young women and men participated in advocacy efforts around the unemployment faced by youth. A petition was drafted and signed by hundreds of young women and men, and a sit-in was organized in front of the PLC offices in Tulkarem concerning the labor law.

2. **Gaza City Campaign: Election Law.** The youth adopted the agenda of the civil society in its demands for amendments to the Elections Law. The campaign focused on establishing a quota for women and lowering the eligible age for nominees. It also advocated a mixed electoral system, whereby 50% of the PLC members would be elected under the standard system of using geographical electoral districts, and 50% would be selected from national electoral lists. A petition was signed by hundreds of young leaders, and several awareness meetings and activities were held.

3. **Almua'askrat Al-Wusta (Gaza Strip) Campaign: Legislation for Youth.** The young leaders reviewed the draft of the Youth Law and organized a campaign to integrate youth and women's concerns. They organized a forum in which several members of the PLC, as well as the Ministers of Youth and Sports, participated. The young leaders discussed with them their vision and presented proposals for alternative legislation. After the forum, several meetings were held between the young women and men from WATC and other institutions, and representatives from the PLC and the ministries, in order to discuss the vision of the youth regarding the law.

Impact

- 150 young women and men leaders conducted 3 successful community awareness campaigns, reaching 39 communities.
- Nearly 80% of the young women and men who were trained went on to play active roles in their communities.
- 500 people were reached directly with messages related to equality in laws and elections.
- A pressure group was formed to follow up on legislation.
- A debate was started on women's rights and legislation.
- Many participants became involved in other activities and programs of WATC and other community organizations through this program.
- Participants indicated that they experienced personal growth during the training and activities and had become more sensitive to gender and women's issues.

"The project made me consider my role as a woman and decide that I will not accept what is imposed by the society's norms and values. I feel that I am capable of accomplishing a lot, and I refuse to be deterred from realizing my vision."

- Project participant

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ment of Young Women and Men Leaders
Supported by DIAKONIA

The goal of this project was to empower young women and men in three districts of the West Bank to participate more actively in developing a democratic society that is more tolerant towards young women and men working together and that involves women in public life. The project also sought to bridge the gap between the older and younger generations of the women's movement. Initially, we had planned to train 75 young men and women, but due to the large number of applicants, we selected 125 youth from 30 sites including rural, urban, academic and refugee communities in the northern, central and southern West Bank. The project was completed at the end of March 2005.

Rasha had not been active in her community in Ramallah before the project. Afterwards, she decided to start a women's discussion group. She helps to link them to other organizations so that they can benefit from training opportunities.

Training

The coordinators and selected youth participated in a four-day training (26 hours) on skills for lobbying and advocacy for gender equality. A course using the *Leading to Choices* curriculum (24 training hours) was given in Ramallah and Tulkarem, which focused on developing leadership and communication skills and teamwork. Eight hours of training on Gender Mainstreaming in Legislation was given to selected youth.

Presentations

Youth participated both as organizers and participants in an advocacy and awareness campaign in targeted communities. During 2005, 27 presentations were made in different communities. Some of them focused on expanding participants' awareness on gender issues, gender analysis of the law, the productive and reproductive roles of women, the role of law in our lives, the importance of youth and women's participation in developing our society, special problems that face youth and women in Palestinian society, volunteerism, unemployment and youth, youth and elections. Others focused on developing skills in counseling, lobbying, advocacy, networking organizing, campaign management, theatre, leadership, assertiveness and social skills.

Activities

WATC organized activities in partnership with local organizations in the four districts, with the aim of exposing the young women and men to the work of these organizations and helping them build relationships, engaging them in volunteer work and offer them opportunities to participate in developing society.

- In the districts of Bethlehem, WATC took youth to visit the Jadal Youth Center, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC) and Defense of Children International. They participated in festivals for the children of prisoners and martyrs, for Women's Day and Mother's Day, and had debate with the released women prisoners, and a demonstration against honor killing.



Activities with blind youth in Bethlehem

- In Tulkarem and Jenin, youth participated in a fun day for children, a social at the Arab Orphan's Society, and visited the mothers of prisoners. In Tulkarem and Ramallah the youth organized a forum on unemployment among youth in which many women's organizations and youth institutions participated.
- A sit-in on the labor law was held in front of the PLC offices in Tulkarem
- A sit-in and a march against "honor killing." Was held in Bethlehem
- The project organized a lecture to raise awareness about "honor killing".
- Coordinators held 5 follow-up meetings with the young leaders in their communities to continue to strengthen relationships with them and to evaluate the project.



Fun day in Tulkarem

Impact

- Youth leaders conducted successful advocacy and awareness campaigns in targeted communities.
- Many participants become involved with WATC's other projects.
- Many participants became involved in the activities and programs of other community organizations they came into contact with through this program
- Participants indicated that they experienced personal growth during the training and activities and had become more sensitive to gender and women's issues
- The participants gained experience with many civil society organizations, learned how to network and benefit from available opportunities, and learned how to participate effectively in the building of a democratic society.
- 230 youth from outside of the project participated in activities organized by the project participants.
- The project fostered closer coordination and cooperation between community organizations.

*"I am proud of my personal growth; you will not believe how much I have changed during this workshop."
Participant from Bethlehem area*

Hasan, a student at Al Quds Open University in Tulkarem:

"It is the first time I've participated in a youth program. This project provided me with the opportunity to get to know what it is like to be part of a team, to express my ideas, listen to others' views, and participate in discussions with young women."

His confidence increased dramatically during the program, and he became an active volunteer with WATC as well as other organizations.

VI. Empowering Young Leaders for Democracy & Good Governance *Supported by DIAKONIA*

This project seeks to develop young people, particularly women, as active participants in nation building and reform and as leaders engaged in advocacy and community awareness work in their communities. The project focused on building knowledge and skills and supporting the young leaders to apply what they learned in advocacy and awareness work in their communities.

"This is the first time I've talked about myself freely: I think if we all got used to talking about ourselves freely, we would be able to change ourselves and others."

At the start of the project in July 2005, WATC hired a general coordinator responsible for activities in the central West Bank and two field coordinators responsible for Gaza and the southern West Bank. We identified 31 target communities in the 3 regions, prepared manuals on gender mainstreaming for the trainers and conducted two needs assessments. We selected 90 young women and men from the three regions instead of 75 as we had planned, due to the high demand. WATC gave two days of training on management of community

"In this training I found that there is gender discrimination in Palestinian laws and we need to work very hard as youth to change this."

awareness campaigns in Gaza and 14 trainings in Gaza, Bethlehem and Ramallah on communication skills, governance, assertiveness, gender, gender mainstreaming in law and adult education skills.

Awareness campaign

Several meetings were held with civil society organizations to coordinate the planning, implementation and monitoring of the campaign.

"This training made me believe that everything that men do, women can also do. There is no difference between men and women. The only difference is whether they are male or female."

Two awareness meetings were held in Gaza Strip. The first was on the amended Palestinian Elections Law and the second was on gender analysis, organized in cooperation with Al-A'ahd Society. Five awareness meetings were held in Bethlehem which focused on Palestinian elections, democracy in Palestine, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a documentary film about the Palestinian women's movement. During these awareness meetings 176 young women and men had the opportunity to discuss gender, democratization, good governance and laws with experts and community leaders.

"Now I can defend women's rights more strongly because during this training I became more knowledgeable about gender and laws."

Impact

There was a strong interest from youth in this program. The participants indicated that they enjoyed the program and benefited from it. They reported that they became more aware of women's issues. They also encouraged other youth to participate as they conducted awareness campaigns on women's and youth issues and rights. This project also created a network of young leaders throughout the country who can mobilize youth for pressure campaigns and activities organized by WATC and other women's committees.

"Before this training I had a lot of ideas I wanted to share with others, especially youth, but I did not know how....I think that I am fulfilling a dream to be able to educate adults and change their ideas."

VII. Sanabel: Empowering Rural Women

*Supported by the Ford Foundation and
the National Endowment for Democracy*

WATC's Sanabel project began in 1997. In February, the project completed a phase begun in August 2003, with the support of the Ford Foundation, to empower 140 rural women selected from Sanabel committees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and began a new phase, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy, to empower 80 rural women selected from Sanabel committees in the Jenin area and four additional villages.

Sanabel's goal is to empower rural women to lead reform and to advocate effectively for policies and legislation which do not discriminate against women by raising their awareness of their rights, equipping them with skills, and mobilizing them as agents of change in their communities and in their own lives. Sanabel provides training for awareness and skills in areas such as leadership, gender, independent decision-making, self confidence, conflict resolution, problem solving, communication, effective outreach, women's rights, networking and advocacy. The project also aims to mobilize women during elections as voters, organizers and candidates for local and national leadership. Sanabel also encourages rural women to participate in the projects and reform and advocacy work conducted by WATC and other women's committees.

Wrap-up of earlier phase

The phase which focused on Hebron, Nablus and Gaza wrapped up in February having trained around 940 women, held over 30 public awareness meetings, started two new committees, and prepared sixteen women to run for office in the local councils. In early 2005, Sanabel conducted training in computer skills and reproductive health for some of the committees in the West Bank, and training in stress management as well as meetings to generate support for women candidates in Gaza. During January, WATC trained some of the Sanabel coordinators in the West Bank in gender reading of laws, and during February Gaza staff were trained in report writing. During an external evaluation of Sanabel, 98.6% of the participants reported that their self confidence, belief in their equality, sense of fulfillment and acceptance of themselves had increased as a result of the project, and 91.4% reported that they felt empowered play leadership roles. The evaluation also indicated that 73.4% of Sanabel participants are rural women, and 52% are housewives.

Establishing the new project

The coordinator contacted existing Sanabel groups in the Jenin area to build on their achievements and skills and made several visits to the villages targeted for establishing new committees, meeting with representatives of the local councils, women's groups, and activists in the local communities in order to introduce WATC and Sanabel and discuss ideas and plans. The coordinator and volunteers from

*Comments by Sanabel
participants*

"It is very easy to be convinced of the ideas that were raised, but it is difficult to make those close to you, such as your husband, children and neighbors, think that what you are doing is okay and doesn't contradict our values. Even my daughter tried to keep me from attending the training workshops."

"The training workshops awoke our subconscious awareness of the oppression practiced against us, and increased our desire to play a more effective role in political, social and economic life."

"For how long will we have this feeling of incapability which stems from the limited opportunities which are available to us?"

"My relationship with my family became stronger. I have the courage to participate in discussions now."

"It is true that we started to have little disagreements, but this is within a good framework, it means she is thinking more about the world."

- Husband of participant

"Now I understand the meaning of making my own decisions."

"It is not enough to believe something, because beliefs have to be translated into a way of life. This does not happen by waving a magic wand. It needs time, and needs to be strengthened every day."

"I decided to change things. I became the first working woman in my community although it is forbidden for women to work."

established Sanabel groups met with women from the target communities to share their experience with the Sanabel project and build relationships between the groups.

Training and workshops

During the second phase of the local council elections, Sanabel continued work to empower women as voters, organizers and candidates. Awareness campaigns on women and elections were conducted in the four target villages. Sanabel conducted 12 trainings on communication skills, 13 on women's rights and human rights, 6 on elections, 13 on managing elections campaigns, 3 on training trainers, 17 on gender analysis of laws and 13 on assertiveness. Documentaries on women and elections and on Palestinian Legislative Council elections produced by WATC were used during some of the trainings. Special sessions were also offered in response to specific needs of some committees on topics as diverse as early marriage, bee raising, sexual violence, dealing with teenagers, and elections. WATC partnered with other organizations to offer workshops in different communities on women in political parties, the new electoral system of the Palestinian Legislative Council, women's participation in the upcoming PLC elections, violence against women, the role of the small political parties in the upcoming PLC elections, the amended elections law and the new regulations for party lists, women's contributions in charitable, national and social roles, and women and the apartheid wall. Sanabel's coordinator, sometimes accompanied by members of committees, attended workshops on the role of women in political parties, good governance, early marriage, pollution and combating domestic violence.

Meetings and networking

Sanabel coordinated and partnered extensively with other organizations in meetings, trainings, workshops and other activities. Coordinators worked with local and regional government officials, community organizations in villages and refugee camps, the YMCA, Palestinian Medical Relief Committee, Women's Studies Centre, General Union for Palestinian Women, the Arab American University, the Civil Forum, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Society, Al Haq, Forum of Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Against Domestic Violence, the Ministry of Agriculture, Radio Ahlam, Jerusalem Centre for Women, Sharek and Palestinian Counseling Centre, among others. Sanabel members participated as supervisors and facilitators in summer camps for children run by other organizations and in an exhibition organized by the Ministry of Agriculture in Ramallah.

Impact

Participants demonstrated greater self-confidence, awareness of their rights and equality to men, ability to express themselves, support for their daughters, concern for their future, conviction that women must be represented at decision making levels, desire for change in their communities, and desire for men to receive the same training. A total of 8 women from Sanabel committee won seats in the local councils -- a major achievement for the women's movement in Palestine.

“I am a woman whose husband refused to let me participate in the presidential elections; he refused to let me go and vote... I decided not to cook for him until he explained to me why I could not vote!! He was very angry with me because of the cooking issue in the house. Finally, the day before the presidential elections, we had a long talk and I personally convinced him to participate and vote for the right person. The next day we went together and voted. This is because of the skills that I learned from Sanabel workshops on elections and leadership...”

VIII. Voice of Women

Supported by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Voice of Women (*Sawt An-Nissa*), a bi-monthly supplement in the Al Ayam newspaper, has been supported by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung since 1997.

Its mission is to promote justice for women and encourage them to participate fully and effectively in society. Each issue features the concerns, accomplishments, experiences and perspectives of women in various communities and sectors of Palestinian society. Voice of Women has had the longest circulation of any publication devoted to women in Palestine. It provides a platform for free expression for all Palestinian and Arab women and has attracted many distinguished writers.

During 2005, WATC published 24 issues of *Voice of Women*. It circulated more than 552,000 copies during the year and added 40 distribution points. Ramallah alone now has 85 distribution centers. Bound volumes of *Voice of Women* are used by libraries and reference centers. Two of *Voice of Women's* writers were awarded prizes by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which also sent certificates of appreciation to WATC and to *Voice of Women* staff for their active support in increasing the participation of women in building a democratic nation. One writer received a prize from the Literary Forum of Arab Youth in Dubai, and some of the articles of another were included in a book published by Ugarit Center. The editor of *Voice of Women* was invited three times to speak on *Voice of Palestine*. The managing editor of *Al Ayyam* conducted a survey on the views of readers of *Voice of Women*. A random cross-section of readers was surveyed and a workshop was held to evaluate content, presentation, and distribution.



Voice of Women / Sawt An -Nissa

During 2005, *Voice of Women* addressed the question of a quota for women for elected seats in local and national government, and reported on the drafting of legislation by Palestinian Legislative Council and participated in the campaign by women's and other organizations in favor of the quota. *Voice of Women* also focused on violence against women and the increasing number of honor killings and absence of effective legal action. In addition, *Voice of Women* covered cultural and artistic accomplishments of women and the tragic and heroic experiences of women in rural and urban communities throughout Palestine under the oppression of the Israeli occupation and under the restrictions rooted in traditional customs. Other topics highlighted this year were: Palestinian women prisoners in Israeli jails, issues faced by female university graduates, the role of foreign solidarity with the women's struggle against occupation, wives and mothers of martyrs and exiles, women on welfare, the affects of the Separation Wall on women; women in leadership in banking, universities, and other institutions, laws for maternity leave, rural projects and economic self-sufficiency of women, Palestinian women Nobel Prize nominees, Palestinian women police officers, the implications of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza for women, stereotyping of women in the Palestinian school curriculum, the challenges facing women reporters in the Arab World and political reform.

IX. Networking

In addition to being itself a coalition of women's organizations, WATC is a member of two committees that have played a significant role in modifying the Elections Law and increasing women's participation in the political arena. WATC networked with member organizations to mobilize a large number of women for the PLC sessions addressing the electoral law and women's quota.

- **The Civil Society Committee for Modifying the Elections Law** worked for 100% proportional representation in the upcoming PLC elections to give small parties the opportunity to be represented in the government. The PLC increased its number of seats to 132. The committee advocated for legislation giving women a quota in party lists and electoral districts, and a 20% open quota in the PLC seats. The PLC endorsed a 20% quota for the half of the seats allocated to proportional party representation, but not for the half of the seats allocated by electoral district. The committee also worked successfully for the ratification of the voter registry to avoid problems that were encountered in the presidential elections, and the minimum age for candidates was lowered to 28, opening up the legislature to youth. The committee also advocated for a leave of absence from employment for candidates rather than compulsory resignation, and for compulsory bank accounts and audits for candidates to increase transparency.

Follow-up Committee for Increasing Women's Political Participation in Elections. This committee, which includes representatives from the ministries of Women's Affairs and Local Government worked for a quota for women in the local and legislative councils. In the local councils, women were granted a minimum of two seats. Just before the third phase of the elections, the PLC tried to remove the requirement for one woman to be listed among the first three names on a list. WATC offices in the West Bank and Gaza served as the centre of operations as the committee and other women's and human rights organizations mobilized to defend this provision with letters to the Head of the PLC, the Prime Minister, and a meetings with the President in which promised not to ratify any legislation that could reduce women's representation. The committee met with PLC members, Former President Mr. Yaser Arafat, President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei'.

Both committees held joint activities such as advocacy and lobbying marches, collecting signatures on statements concerning the elections law and women's representation, running ads in the newspapers and requesting meeting with decision-makers on all levels. The members of both committees attended all PLC sessions for the first, second and third reading of the Elections Law and documented the positions of the different members for future evaluation.

X. Staff development and strategic planning

Staff development and monitoring

During 2005, WATC trained its coordinators and project workers on the laws and the draft laws, and held workshops related to the elections, the penal law, and personal statutes. WATC also trained staff in report writing. Coordinators made field visits and recorded the responses of participants and members of the community about the project. Overall monitoring was conducted by the project manager and WATC director. The project team met every month to discuss the plans of action, obstacles, guidelines and coordinating activities. Such meetings

also facilitated the exchange of experiences, minimizing error and facilitating the transfer of knowledge and expertise among the team members. Along with project staff, WATC's legal consultants also attended different local and regional workshops with other women's and human rights organizations where they offered their expertise and benefited from other's experiences.

Strategic planning

WATC core staff members, members of the executive committee, and some members of the board took part in a strategic planning workshop. Additional 3-hour internal sessions took place, with all staff and field coordinators participating in assessing analysis of the strengths and weaknesses. The strategy paper for the coming 3 years (2006-2008) was drafted.

XI. Acknowledgements

We at WATC would like to express our deepest appreciation to our funders for their partnership in our work and their support for the Palestinian people in building a just and democratic society in which every citizen can participate to her or his fullest potential:

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To another year of struggle and success.