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**Editorial: Palestinian Children's Rights**

UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy visited Palestine at a disturbing time, coming into contact with the cases of Palestinian children who have been killed, injured, and deprived of their rights. Ms. Bellamy has tried to visit Palestine several times before, but security conditions on the ground prevented her from doing so.

Ms. Bellamy, head of the world's largest children's right organization, had the chance to listen to, observe, and express solidarity with Palestinian children for whom suffering has become part of their daily lives. Many children in Gaza City, Rafah and Jenin have lost relatives during the frequent Israeli invasions of their cities.

Ms. Bellamy assisted with transferring the Tawjihi (matriculation) exams to Gaza. But will it be possible for students in Rafah to get to the exam halls in order to take the Tawjihi? What about those whose houses have been demolished: will they be able to find a quiet place to study, do they even have books anymore? Will those who lived under the shelling be able to forget what happened, and focus on the exam?

Maslow's theory of human needs states that one must fulfill basic needs first, including food, clothing, shelter and security, before being able to pursue higher needs. Based on this theory, Jenin and Rafah's children are unable to develop the creative aspects of their personalities since even their most basic needs are not fulfilled.

Also, Biagi's theory argues that every new experience is built on a previous one and has an influence on the one that follows. Thus, Palestinian children who live insecurely, under severe political, economic and social conditions, will live, all the time, with these experiences that will negatively affect their new experiences.

What does Ms. Bellamy say about all that? She is the one who is defending children's rights, who is opposing any discrimination against them based on religion, sex or nationality and is also promoting child development in a healthy atmosphere.

What does she say when seeing the debris in Rafah, when visiting martyrs' families, who have been forced to leave their houses so that they can be demolished in front of their eyes?

What does she say about the more than 100 children that have been killed in less than 6 months?

Isn't it time to have an international presence to protect the Palestinian people and stop the Israeli violations of human rights and above all, children's rights?!

### **After the massacre: How will women's organizations help women in Rafah?**

Many local and international associations are competing to help people in Rafah after the brutal massacre committed by the Israeli army. This massacre brought the 1948 catastrophe back to the minds of the Palestinian people, with all its disastrous effects: hunger, poverty, destruction and blockades.

*Voice of Women* documented the reactions of representatives from women's organizations.

*Na'ila Aiesh*, executive manager of the Women's Affairs Centre in Gaza, said that their primary focus is creating a documentary film about the massacre, using their own resources. In addition, they have been in contact with branches of the Arab Women's Forum, "Aisha" in most countries in order to disseminate information and reports about the massacre. They have also contacted the Solidarity Center in Tunisia as well as several attorneys in order to file a claim against the Israeli government in the International Criminal Court, and have sent a memorandum to the Security Council appealing for immediate international protection for the Palestinian People.

*Nadia Abu Nahleh*, executive manager of WATCPAL in Gaza, stressed that Rafah is in urgent need of assistance in order to rebuild its infrastructure. She added that WATCPAL issued an immediate press release, calling on all international and European human rights associations to act and to support the mobilization of international protection for the Palestinians and to pressure for the withdrawal of the Israeli military forces from the refugee camps. She also mentioned that WATCPAL had participated in a demonstration organized by various national movements to support people in Rafah.

*Laila Baioumi*, coordinator of the Palestinian Working Women Development Association in Gaza, talked about participating with youth and other organizations in a hunger strike until the end of the siege of Rafah. Ms. Baioumi added that her association participated in the demonstration which took place which resulted in presenting an appeal to the United Nations to fulfill its responsibilities towards the refugee camps and to take immediate and effective action. The Association had an important role in contacting international human rights associations, especially in France.

Despite all these efforts, Rafah will need a long time to recover, because what happened there is much bigger than any organization can deal with. It will be many years before normal life will return to Rafah.

### **A German engineer works to support the Palestinian people**

“To support the Palestinian people and return the rights to their owners” is the slogan of the project that has been launched by Fiebi Mayer, a German agricultural engineer, aiming at helping the Palestinian people in general and the Palestinian farmers in particular. This project is concerned with marketing high quality honey to the German market, where it is sold at high prices and, consequently, helps farmers who have suffered repeated losses due to the Israeli forces and tanks destroying their crops and products.

Ms. Mayer, in an interview with *Voice of Women*, denounced Israel’s crimes of systematically razing lands, destroying trees and demolishing houses in front of the whole world, including the human rights associations.

Ms. Mayer raises bees and produces one of the highest qualities of honey in the world. With a group of volunteers, she markets the honey to help the Palestinian people to live in dignity equally with other people in the world. A brochure is included with every package of honey describing Israel’s actions against the Palestinians, their lands, trees, birds and animals which violate all international laws and human rights agreements, including those which have been signed by Israel itself. The aim is to communicate the truth free of the distortions created by western media outlets which blindly support the Israeli point of view.

Ms. Mayer said that the Palestinian honey is of a high quality, and that even the bees in Germany are in solidarity with the bees in Palestine! There are hundreds of people, she said, who would like to come and express their sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinian people, but are prevented by the obstacles created by Israel.

Ms. Mayer has visited many Arab countries; she loves the Arabic culture and is proud to speak the Arab language; she is an anti-war activist in addition to her work on human rights.

### **After 11 Surgeries, Amira struggles to survive! *Mirvat Abu Jami, Gaza***

Amira is lucky to have a mother like hers. With the continuous support of her mother, Amira has been able to overcome everything she has been through -- both her physical disability and the surrounding environment preventing her from having the life of a normal child. Her story tells of the power of the human will to overcome every challenge.

Farwana, Amira's mother, says that Amira has changed her life from that of an ordinary housewife, taking care of her husband and children without much interaction with her community, to that of a successful woman and social activist. Since she first heard from the doctor that Amira had been born with physical defects, Farwana was determined to start the long journey of treatment for her beloved daughter, and she has not forgotten the many other patients that she has met on the way. While many were pessimistic about her daughter's chances of recovery, Farwana held on with her strong will and her faith.

Amira has had eleven surgeries on her knees, joints and legs. Since she started going to school she has become one of the top students. Farwana says that Amira is still in need of four more surgeries in the United States before she will be completely normal.

Amira's mother has expanded her service to her community by establishing a charity under Amira's name "Amira For Women's Development" which helps provide treatment for injuries and alleviate suffering. She established a kindergarten in a rural area of Gaza and started a program providing food to 1200 malnourished children in Rafah and Khan Younis. In addition she has organized courses for young women in sewing, decoration, and tricot while working to preserve Palestinian heritage within the organization. Daily meals are also distributed to all children in the kindergartens in the area. The charity's mission is to improve women's skills and broaden their capabilities in order to empower them to play a greater role in their own society.

### **Palestine after Kuwait and Dubai Religious court forms advisory units to protect families**

In light of the increasing divorce rate in Palestine, the religious courts have created advisory units to provide family counseling. Supporters of these units hope for more solutions to be found that can avert the legal tangles that divorce often involves. Some doubt the efficiency of this system and see it as an extension of the old social adjustment trial system which favored the stronger party and did not tackle the roots of the problems.

It is still too early to judge the success of this experiment. Some expect that the solutions that are proposed in counseling will ultimately be those which place the burden on the weaker party, the woman. Something similar has been tried in Kuwait and Dubai but so far other neighboring countries have not created such alternatives.

The opinions of people interviewed vary between supporters who think that this is a positive experiment and it should not be judged before it has been given a chance, especially considering the shortcomings of the judiciary and executive systems, while other people are undecided. A third group thinks that the legal system is the only correct way to deal with these issues, despite the fact that it might be unfair to the woman in many cases, yet it is better than a system based on shaming the parties. A fourth group thinks that the advisory unit is a positive development as it allows the parties to discuss

their problems freely in front of a neutral third party. It is important that the third party be well qualified, experienced and knowledgeable about the legal rights of all the parties.

The advisory and family adjustment units started their work at the beginning of the year after a presidential decree followed by a memo by Chief Justice Sheikh Tayseer Tamimi last December.

Sheikh Tamimi says that the religious courts have tackled 1250 cases, 26% of which ended in assent while 23% agreed on the causes of the conflict and eventually reached a solution with certain compromises. Twenty-five percent of these cases were forwarded to the legal courts.

### **Major reduction**

Sheikh Tamimi notes that this represents a major reduction in the divorce rates. He states that he hopes the advisory units will contribute to a further reduction of the divorce rate. Indeed, some of the cases, up to 6%, were solved before hearing it in courts. Sheikh Tamimi says that the Advisory units will also organize pre-marital courses for couples, awareness campaigns, and print brochures with information about the rights and responsibilities of partners in marriage. Sheikh Tamimi also states that the advisory units need to increase the size of their staff, giving particular attention to having enough female employees so that women are able to discuss their concerns and problems freely.

### **Case study**

A man in his sixties came back home from Colombia and got ready for his wife and daughter join him, but they refused to because of the political situation in the country. He says that he began to suffer from deep depression and decided to get engaged to another woman in her forties. After signing the marriage contract, his daughter called and pleaded with her father to come back to Colombia. This made him uncertain about continuing with his plans for marriage. When he asked to break the engagement, he and his fiancée ended up in a dispute which lasted for a year and a half. The man decided to approach the advisory unit for help. A meeting was organized between the man and his fiancée and they agreed to solve the problem in accordance with the religious law. Mr. Hammad, the head of the advisory unit in Ramallah, said that it took him a long time to bring about an understanding between the parties as to their rights and obligations and the consequences if the case reached the legal courts.

It is worth mentioning that most of the cases in front of the advisory units have resulted from the current difficult sociopolitical situation the Palestinian families suffer. These problems start because of simple reasons and the complications make them irresolvable. These kinds of problems need a nonbiased third party to assist the couple, and the advisory units may be able to play this role. Can the advisory units succeed where the others failed? This question needs time, and must be answered by the parties themselves.

