

## 'Social security' ... Without a guarantor

**Mohammad Marar**

A positive atmosphere dominated the crisis surrounding the social security law in recent days, following approval by the Palestinian government to return the law for public debate. Anxiety and concern had affected thousands of employees working in institutions and companies since President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree about this law on the 23rd of March. Widespread social protests were initiated by legal institutions and the National Campaign for Social Security to warn of the risks of this decree, as highlighted in a demonstration in front of the Cabinet in Ramallah on the 19th of April in which thousands of employees participated.

Although the National Campaign applauded the return of the law for public debate, they confirmed that their activities would continue to address all the issues stated against the law. These issues included the absence of a guarantor for contributions, the unequal distribution of contributions by employees and institutions, and the conditions imposed on salary entitlement in the event of a natural death.

### The need to freeze the law

Prominent personalities in the Palestinian government have confirmed on many occasions that the social security law was drafted on principles of good governance. This was rejected by National Campaign member Iyad Ryahi, who said that the law had been drafted and adopted without any serious debate. He noted that the crisis had exacerbated confusion in private education institutions, banking, and civil and private sectors regarding pension funds and end of service fees. He warned that the disbursement of these payments to employees risked forcing the closure of these institutions.

In an interview with al-Hal, Ryahi stated: "The fear is that the government will carry out what it announced a few weeks ago, i.e. this stage is dedicated for the preparation of statutes and regulations and debate with

stakeholders will be opened to gather feedback about the decree only once the law is in effect. Thus, discussions will not serve any purpose."

Ryahi called for an immediate halt to the law to ease tensions and to make amendments to the law through dialogue among various parties.

MP Bassam Salih said that dialogue must include parliamentary parties, the ministerial committee formed by the government, and the National Campaign for Social Security. He noted that it would take up to 6 weeks to examine the issues emanating from the dialogue.

He added that the anxiety and confusion experienced by employees and institutions during the recent period would dissipate with the start of amendments to the law as a result of dialogue.

### Benefit from the experience of neighboring countries

MP Najat Abu Baker said that the parliament was incapable under any circumstances of resolving this crisis related to putting this law into effect. She laid the responsibility on the government for causing 'tension' in Palestinian society due to 15 devastating articles in the law and the absence of a guarantor for the rights of employees, whether from the government or others. Abu Baker said that work is underway between parliamentary groups and other parties to put pressure for the required amendments to be implemented. She called all relevant parties to examine social security laws in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt to adopt aspects suited to the Palestinian situation.

### A law in favor of employers

The Director of the Center for the Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights, 'Hurriyat' Hilmi A'raj, believes that the law serves employers. He noted that the sum deducted from the employee's salary for social security is 7.5%, which is high, versus 8.5% from the employer, a low percentage.

### Give us back our children

A mother stands waiting for her son, her lion and her support, to appear, but he did not show up. Another mother planted her backyard with wild narcissus that she vowed would be for her son's wedding, but a bullet from a soldier's gun shattered her dream and the narcissi have become a wreath for a martyr, for an awaited funeral. In the alleys of Jerusalem, a tenacious father tells the world that he cannot be sure that his son is dead because he has not seen the dead body. He asks for his son's body to declare: "We belong to God and to Him we shall return".

The families of martyrs will stand tomorrow to call for the corpses to be returned to them. We will all stand with them in the heart of our city to say to the dumb Netanyahu and to all those who do not understand the meaning of the death of a cherished one, give us back our children to bury them and mourn.

Then we will gather what is left of life and patience to say: "There is no God but God, and the martyr is God's beloved one. Long live Palestine."



A'raj pointed out that "these rates may eventually affect the private savings of employees, which will be constantly eroded. This harms the interests of marginalized groups and those who are supposed to benefit from the law."

### Injustice for women

Although issues about the negative implications of the law include employees of all categories, including men, women, and people with disabilities, Samar Hawash, Women's Empowerment Coordinator at the Palestinian Working Woman's Society for Development, believes that some articles in the law are unfair to women in particular. She said: "There is an article on maternity leave, which is normally paid by the employer

so that the woman will have paid leave, but this law has transferred this responsibility from the employer to the citizen, creating a problem."

In the same article, under maternity leave, Hawash said that the law prevents a woman from having paid maternity leave unless she has completed a specific number of contributions to the social security fund, although social bodies call for maternity leave to be available from day one of work.

A third point that Hawash finds is unfair to women's rights is the inheritance of a pension in the event of a natural death. The law excludes unmarried women from inheriting the pension even if their economic conditions are dire. Women are also not allowed to give their pension to their husbands

after death unless he can prove that he suffers from health problems that prevent him from working.

Hawash referred to another issue under discussion recently relating to parental leave for fathers. This is not included in the law, although it has a positive effect on men and women alike as a husband can assist his wife and bear some of the burden of childcare with her.

The dispute over the law has been extended to include the management of the social security fund. The law stipulates that the government form a Board of Directors, while legal parties call for participants in the Fund to manage it by establishing a general assembly that will hold direct elections for an administrative board and council.

# Refusal of clearance closes the last door in the face of blue card holders

**Zoya Ibrahim**

In mid-October last year, I was invited to a media conference held in Cairo. I am a resident of Ramallah, but because I was born in the Gaza Strip, I hold the blue [ID] card in addition to my passport rather than the green card held by West Bank residents. I need to acquire a clearance permit from the Jordanian representative office in Ramallah in order to go to Jordan or any other country via Jordan.

"Your request was rejected there (in Jordan) and we have no idea why," was the answer of the employee at the Jordanian representative office when I asked him why it had been refused, two weeks after applying for this permit for the first time. As a result, I lost the opportunity to participate in the conference.

Since last November until mid-April this year, I have applied for clearance and have been rejected without knowing why.

The Israeli occupation divides Palestinians by separating them into West Bank residents, Gaza Strip residents, and Jerusalemites. Those who hold a green card are divided in two groups: the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Those who hold a green card and live in the Gaza Strip or were born there, or those who did not change the address on their card from Gaza to the West Bank and actually live in the West Bank, hold a blue card and are required to obtain clearance to be allowed into Jordan. Holders of blue cards report to a special window at the King Hussein Bridge border crossing, which is known as window number 10.

Since the middle of last year, clearance has gradually been restricted and entering Jordan or travelling to another country via Jordan is no longer an easy matter for blue card holders.

Majdi Abu Zaid leads a group called Movement that seeks to resolve the problem of clearance for blue card holders. He said: "The problem affects those who hold a blue card and therefore require clearance to travel to or via the Kingdom of Jordan. This was given easily previously, usually within four days of an application. In mid-2015, citizens holding the blue card started complaining about difficulties obtaining the clearance that allows them to visit Jordan or travel to other countries via Jordan, in addition to the rejection of a large number of applications."

In spite of the refusal to grant clearance for a large number of applications, security sources in the Jordanian government confirmed that "there is no official or security decision to prevent entry of people from the Gaza Strip to Jordan. Applications for clearance remain as normal and the Jordanian authorities still receive and respond to these applications as usual."

The Movement group has been following this issue since late September. Abu Zaid stated: "We communicated with the Jordanians at the Jordanian representative office and addressed Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah to seek a solution to this problem, and we are still waiting."

The restriction on obtaining clearance has affected the lives of many people who hold a blue card, especially students who study abroad and people who travel for medical reasons, work, or even to visit their relatives.

Twenty-year-old Mr. B.A., who was born in the Gaza Strip and is a resident of Ramallah and holds a blue card, said: "I suffer from a dermatological problem and was receiving medical treatment in Jordan. I have been applying for clearance to travel to Jordan for four months now and each time I get no response at all, not a positive or a negative reply."

He added: "My medical condition requires continuous supervision by the doctor, who had to treat me recently via Whatsapp. Moreover, the medications I need are not available in the West Bank and I used to get them from Jordan."

Palestinian-Jordanian coordination officers have intervened on behalf of some citizens who hold the blue card and whose clearance was rejected, to grant them entry. For example, twenty-four-year old Mr. A.A., a Gazan student who lives in the West Bank and studies in Germany, was rejected clearance for no given reason and resorted

to coordination with Jordanian intelligence to allow him to travel via Jordan to Germany.

He said: "If I was refused entry to Jordan, I would not have been able to travel to Germany to continue my education. This was complicated and organizing the coordination was not easy at all. Therefore, I am not considering coming back to the West Bank until this problem is resolved."

The Movement group holds the Palestinian Authority responsible for the inability to obtain clearance to travel to Jordan. Abu Zaid explained: "We are Palestinian citizens and we have the right to have our problem resolved as long as we are a state and as long as the Kingdom of Jordan recognizes us."

He added: "I do not hold Jordan responsible because they are a sovereign state and have other security problems stemming from the refugee crisis. Jordan has its security justifications that we do not want to discuss,

but as Palestinian citizens, the Palestinian Authority must assume its responsibility towards us and should resolve the issue with those concerned."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Palestinian government, Yusef al-Mahmoud said: "Efforts are underway to resolve this issue altogether", although he did not explain the reasons for the restrictions imposed on clearance. He added: "We took action as soon as the problem started. Attempts to resolve it were carried out by the government; such issues are procedural and can usually be resolved".

Al-Hal newspaper tried to communicate with the Jordanian representative office but received no response.

Gazans, whether in the West Bank or in the Gaza Strip, hope that the PA will resolve the issue of blue card holders to enable them to travel, as is the right of all citizens.



# Gender-Sensitive Document ... Hopes hang on the shoulders of journalists

**Nadin Aranki**

To mark the 8th of March, the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University organized a big event in Jericho attended by 280 individuals, including journalists and the managers of several media institutions. They launched a 'Policy Document for a Gender-Sensitive Media in Palestine', a document that had been officially signed by these journalists.

According to experts, this document is one of the newest and most powerful interventions related to female journalists and the media during the last five years. Al-Hal interviewed some observers and stakeholders to find out about the anticipated impact of the document and what it may signify in the future for women's issues in the media.

Nahed Abu Taimeh, gender unit coordinator at MDC, explained that the document is available on the official MDC website for journalists to sign. She stated that the document focuses on three main aspects: the first emphasizes good press practices, including ethical sensitivity in reporting, in editing gender and family issues, and a halt to the trading of images reflecting violence and blood that encourage further violence. The second aspect deals with the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) and its role in news coverage and the management of media institutions. The third aspect is related to the adoption by media institutions of these gender-sensitive policies.

Abu Taimeh said: "Media coverage of gender issues has problematic concepts and there are errors in differentiating between a victim and a survivor." Problems arise from the publication of pictures of women, specifically of a woman who has been killed, or even when pictures of her children are posted. Abu Taimeh said that minimal professional ethics are absent, and not only in gender-sensitive issues. She

believes that the document could hold the management of media institutions responsible for their news coverage of gender issues.

This document is not a law and is not legally binding, but it constitutes professional ethics and therefore, the PJS had been involved to put pressure on media institutions to adopt the document.

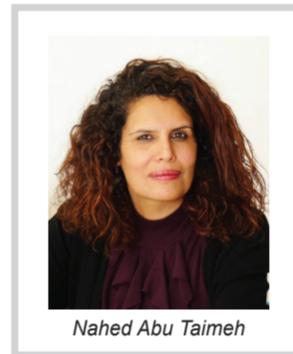
## A positive initiative

Ghazi Bani Oudeh, director of media and public relations at the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), explained that the media and journalists face many pitfalls relating to gender issues, and that the problems require steps to create a more equitable and fairer media coverage in this area.

Bani Oudeh stated: "The document is necessary to bridge gaps in this context, and the first step is to admit the presence of a problem." He added that the adoption of this document is voluntary because it is not possible to confine those working in the media within a strict model, but the policies proposed in the document are a positive initiative to stimulate possible solutions.

He noted that a major aspect of the policy document is acknowledgment that flaws exist and can be addressed by providing alternative terminology and concepts that will eventually change societal images of the roles of men and women. He added: "The local media is a product of the community and thus, it conveys some of its problems and maladies. But it has a huge responsibility in shaping public opinion; this was the purpose of the policy document on those who form public opinion."

Bani Oudeh explained that the document is based on a simple premise, which is for journalists, media managers, media students and the Syndicate "to work towards fairness and recognition of the



Nahed Abu Taimeh



Lubna Ashqar



Ghazi Bani Oudeh

issues in this area. It could be as simple as the use of terminology such as police or fire personnel instead of policeman or fireman, which closes the door in the face of women working in these fields." He described the policy document as the culmination of lengthy and extensive work not necessarily directly connected to this specific document. Gender equality had been sought in Palestinian society for many years, and had possibly accelerated in the last twenty years or so. This has been clearly apparent in the media due to its important multidisciplinary role. The policy document represents only the beginning of this road.

Lubna Ashqar, media officer at the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), said: "The Palestinian media has shown some positive trends to date regarding female integration in media and news coverage, but there is a big gap between what is said in theory and the reality on the ground."

She believes that the volume of coverage on women's issues is limited, mainly superficial, and lacks any depth in addressing women and social issues. Ashqar praised the document as important by focusing on the media and its coverage of women's issues, the work of media institutions and gender sensitivity within these bodies, and equality and fairness towards the status of female journalists and when reporting on women in the media.

Ashqar explained the part of the policy document addressing the PJS: "Up to this moment, the representation of women journalists in the trade union remains less than 25%. Female representation on the Board of the PJS is only one woman versus 23 male Board members." She hopes that the document will mark the beginning of change in the number of female colleagues in the PJS General Secretariat during future elections.

Ashqar explained that the intellectual climate in the management of media institutions is not pro-women. For instance, coverage of social issues is usually given to female colleagues, while political, economic and significant issues are covered by male colleagues. She called upon media institutions to offer opportunities for training and development to female journalists and to entrust them with similar job assignments to their male counterparts.

Years ago, female journalists were not employed as extensively in the media arena as they are today. However, media content still requires improvement and deals with women's issues as immediate issue. Ashqar called for more in-depth analysis of humanitarian issues rather than making quick judgments. "Our media improvises when addressing women's issues by talking about them in the same way that society does. Thus, media coverage reproduces the same culture."

## From the Palestinian Museum



The Palestinian Museum building

Birzeit

© Palestinian Museum

Each issue of Al-Hal will feature a photograph in cooperation with the Palestinian Museum, which will open its doors for the first time in the town of Birzeit in May 2016. The Museum is supported by the Welfare Association.

# Nablus: Female engineers go beyond their profession!



## Abdel Baset Khalaf

Twenty-three female engineers have unleashed their creative talents beyond their academic specialties and have brightened the halls of the engineering trade union in Nablus. The activities of these engineers, their spouses and the spouses of other engineers reveal the art of food and desserts, painting, recycling, embroidery, carving, design, decoration, soap production and more.

Architect Lana Shaar said: "Female engineers are creative even outside their field of work. Here, I am drawing faces and famous personalities. Anyone who wants to get their picture drawn only has to sit still for few minutes and they will have a special souvenir drawn in pencil."

Shaar, a new graduate, states that female engineers can produce many beautiful paintings that touch the heart, and thereby redefine engineering in a new and aesthetic manner.

### Ornamentation

In another corner, Leem Khreem, a civil engineer who graduated five years ago, presents a table decorated with desserts; the cakes and chocolate bars are all made with a special touch.. She said: "Decorating cakes requires some knowledge of engineering and art, which encourages our interest in it, and visitors stop for some time to look at our work. It is true that we usually work in our field of specialization and become known there, but it is nice to extend beyond those boundaries sometimes and demonstrate our other skills."

Yaman Gazal, the wife of engineer Bahaa Tufaha, makes food and dessert dishes in a way that reflects the influence of her husband's field of work. She presents appetizing plates of food that is prepared rapidly. She said: "Everything has changed in our times and people have no time to think about food. Fast food is becoming prevalent, but we are presenting a model for a return to appetizing homemade meals and confectionery."

For Fatima, the path of art was not a smooth one. Her graduation as an architect was delayed from 1985 to nine years later due to the stone Intifada. Nevertheless, her homemade pastries and food are in demand and shoppers are encouraged to replicate them in their homes.

She said: "The nice thing is that we put engineering aside in our display and got involved in new fields. We only return to our basic skills in the methods of presentation and decoration, which make our displays special and different from ordinary ones."

### Savoir faire

According to Lana Sader, head of the committee for Nablus women engineers, the City Bazaar was the first to combine food with art, and drawing with desserts, embroidery, antiques, soaps and detergents. It highlights the creativity of women engineers outside their main specializations. She said: "We are ambitious people who never give in to despair. We are capable of being creative with simple tools and without the need for donors and external funding. The main thing we have done is to present visitors and the public with a message that redefines women engineers, presenting their skills in their art work, hobbies, and good taste."

She added: "We gave 23 female engineers and the wives of engineers an opportunity to exhibit their creative work, and this will be certainly repeated in the future."

Hweida Abu Yacoub and her husband, engineer Zafer Jaber, have been manufacturing soap from olive oil for the past five years. They make new types of soap such as honey, goat's milk, black seed, sea mud and French lavender.

Abu Yacoub said: "Our products have now reached Germany and Britain. We are planning to market these products in the Gulf region also. The most important aspect that we tell people is to encourage them to return to nature, which will not cause harm as chemicals do."

In another corner, chemical engineer Maha Fuqaha talks about her experience, together with Abdalla Dweikat, her husband and companion, who is specialized in the same field. She said: "We must use chemicals sparingly because we cannot wash our hands with chlorine or swallow it."

Maha and her husband started their own enterprise producing new types of detergents and are trying to cross borders and market these products abroad.

### Recycling

Engineer Samah Asaad has a special skill. Some years ago, she started recycling different materials and manufactured creative objects from discarded items that were on their way to the refuse.

In Samah's corner, pieces of cloth, paper, old newspapers, discarded plastic, glass and metal cans now form some 130 stands for beautiful household utensils.

She said: "People did not believe that I am an architect who collects old and used items; I never throw things in the garbage but turn them into handmade crafts and accessories."

Samah did not stop at making an attractive exhibition of her works of art to exploit her engineering skills, but also trains women and

children in her method of manufacturing and recycling materials to mitigate the environmental burden of waste.

### Colors

For engineer Nora Khreem, embroidery is more than a hobby. She started with a standard fabric that does not change with time and uses various forms of accessories such as rings and trinkets. Today, she employs six families with her and says: "An engineer should excel personally and with others, and must help their community not only to build their houses, but to sustain and support the economy."

Chemical engineer Nahla Salameh also embroiders as a hobby, adding a traditional touch to her house antiques and art works.

Chemical engineer Nahawand Suqieh re-defines engineering as a return to nature. She adds natural extracts such as honey and lavender to the soap and cosmetics that she manufactures. She said: "It is important to return to nature since this protects the skin from wrinkles and early aging; it prolongs and maintains the youthful look of those who use it regularly."

Architect Hind Shunnar designs handmade invitation cards for happy occasions of a superior quality to imported cards. She noted: "There is a strong relationship between art and engineering because we cannot do anything without art. Even when it comes to the design of household interiors or providing hospitality, an engineer excels at that."

### Arts

Mais Rasel Abu Saa', a graduate in fine arts and wife of engineer Khattab Takrouri, combines art, environmental aspects and creativity. She explains: "I reuse almost everything left over at home. I do not put fruit stones and peel in the refuse. I also collect discarded plastic items and ask my neighbors to send me the remnants of fruits and vegetables or plastic and glass. I use soil in my paintings and colors. I also draw using coffee and Nescafe."

She said: "Those who see my works of art and accessories would not believe that they are made from the remains of lemon or peach stones, tamarind seeds, or from cardboard, discarded plastic, broken tiles gathered from factories, and copper wire."

Abu Saa', who was born in 1976 and started drawing at the age of twelve, was influenced by her father who was an artist. "He who seeks excellence and distinction must avoid stereotypical thinking and look for new methods of creativity. The most important is to return to nature and the environment, which is diverse and beautiful."



Creative works of art in an exhibition for female engineers.