

**Jerusalem Center for Women**  
**Annual Report 2000**

## **The Jerusalem Center for Women**

The Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) was established in March 1994 as an outgrowth of an ongoing dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli women which had begun in 1989, sparked by the impetus of the popular Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. The Center is completely autonomous, but was created simultaneously with an Israeli women's peace center, Bat Shalom. The two centers operate independently, maintaining executive and organizational integrity, but are linked through their coordinating body, the Jerusalem Link. This arrangement is in effect the first time that Palestinian and Israeli organizations have worked so closely together for the advancement of women and human rights in the region, as well as towards a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

JCW is committed to advancing joint peace work, despite the consideration of changing political realities. We believe that crises are opportunities for positive change that should not be missed. In addition, JCW is committed to developing relationships with other Israeli peace groups with whom we share a vision for peace building.

The underlying context for JCW's work is the dual nature of the struggle in which Palestinians are currently engaged: the national political struggle for independence and the right to self-determination and the struggle to create a democratic civil society based on a respect for the law, equality and for political, ideological and religious pluralism.

The Jerusalem Center for Women envisions Palestinian women empowered and involved in the process of nation and state building and all aspects of Palestinian and civil society developments. We provide women with venues for training in democracy, human rights, advocacy and life skills in order to advance women's status and role in the decision-making process, as well as to protect human rights and democratic principles and build a just peace.

JWC's goals are:

Women's empowerment in community and political activism.

Protection and advancement of Palestinian women's rights and status.

Women's involvement in realizing a regional peace based on justice.

Establishment of local and international networks supporting JCW in achieving its goals.

## **2. The Year 2000**

The year 2000 marked the build up to and beginning of the second Palestinian *Intifada*, or uprising, and therefore the context in which the Jerusalem Center for Women endeavored to operate was extremely tense and dangerous. 2000 saw an unprecedented increase in military activities of the Israeli forces, a vast increase in restrictions on movement, closures of educational facilities, arrests, brutality and killings. Within this environment, the Jerusalem Center for Women was forced to reassess certain of its objectives for the year and increased its focus on the support and development of Palestinian women while its peace building activities with Israeli partner, Bat Shalom, were somewhat hampered by the increase in hostilities.

For the NGO community, which is a key component of the Palestinian civil society, it has been necessary to assess its regular work and make modifications to cope with the changes in the political reality and the new needs of its target groups. Such has been the case of the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW). All of its work was affected by the closure, which made travel by staff and participants to training groups and other activities highly problematic, and in part motivated a shift in concentration towards the Jerusalem area. This shift was also due to an increased understanding of the many special needs of women in the Jerusalem area, to the lack of functioning women's organization which addressed these needs and to the feeling that JCW's resources could best be used if focused on a limited area.

JCW is a women's organization which is politically oriented and which promotes the empowerment of women for political participation. Since its establishment, JCW has been the sole women's organization that has adopted a program of Palestinian-Israeli political dialogue for peace making. JCW has been also involved actively in different human rights coalitions including the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council, the campaign to end ID confiscation and the Coalition of Jerusalem NGOs.

### **3. JCW Current Programs:**

#### ***Dialogue Program***

The peace building dialogue between Jerusalem Center for Women and Bat Shalom continued in 2000 with a series of meetings and ongoing communications between the two organizations. The main focus of the talks centered on the increasingly difficult political and security situation and towards the end of the year the two groups faced increased difficulties in agreeing on certain issues pertaining to the conflict. By the end of the year, relations were reaching a very difficult point as the Israeli peace group considered the Intifada to be a violent attack on their way of life while the Palestinian side maintained that it is a legitimate struggle for national sovereignty.

#### ***Human Rights Education and Advocacy***

Throughout 2000, the Center held four training and information sessions on human rights and advocacy in the YWCA in East Jerusalem. The aim of the information sessions was to inform Palestinian women of their rights under international law and to suggest methods for them to address breaches of those rights such as launching lobbying and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness among decision makers. A key area that was discussed in the program was ID confiscation and possible legal recourse for when this occurs.

#### ***Tours***

In 2000, the Jerusalem Center for Women led a number of political field tours to areas of East Jerusalem and the West Bank worst affected by the occupation. Those who attended

the tours included Jerusalem Center for Women volunteers, staff from other women's organizations and NGOs, and staff from international consulates based in Jerusalem. The participants in the tours met with women who have first hand experience of human rights abuses as a result of the occupation and were invited to share in their experiences.

### ***Training***

In September 2000, the Center commenced a training program entitled Civic Education and Democracy Training for Palestinian Women, which aims to educate 90 young women in both the West Bank and Gaza in topics such as group dynamics, civil society and processes of democracy, feminist perspectives on democracy, human rights, CEDAW and gender discrimination. Workshops covered the following objectives:

- To raise participants' awareness of their rights
- To raise participants' awareness of the importance of their participation in community development
- To result in several trainees becoming community activists
- To give participants the life skills necessary for empowerment
- To introduce gender awareness into discussions of democracy and human rights in order to influence the level of debate in Palestinian society

The program also encompassed a number of field visits to key organizations such as the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling and the Women's Studies Center. The major fields of qualifications for the trainers selected include – human rights, gender, psychology, conflict resolution and facilitation skills. The program will continue its next phase in 2001.

### ***Workshops***

In June 2000, the Center hosted a workshop on women in conflict resolution in Ramallah which was attended by over 60 participants. The workshop dealt with issues such as women's experience in conflict resolution around the world, women's alternative ways for peace, the specific impact of conflict on women and non-violent means of protest.

### ***Palestinian Outreach***

JCW remains active in the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council, which focuses on violations of human rights of Palestinians whether exercised by Israel or the PNA, documenting special cases and organizing advocacy activities. It also participated actively in the NGOs Jerusalem Council, which was established in October 2000 to address emergency issues resulting from the Israeli aggression and to provide a venue for networking and cooperation.

### **What JCW expects to do in 2001:**

#### ***Palestinian-Israeli Peace Work***

The Jerusalem Center for Women hopes that in 2001 it will be possible to enter fruitful dialogue with the Israeli peace camp, particularly Bat Shalom, despite the current political crisis. The possibility of achieving real results in the area of Palestinian-Israeli peace dialogue depends on a number of factors that are entirely unpredictable at present including the security situation, the willingness of the Israeli peace organizations to continue dialogue in the current crisis, the ability of Palestinians and Israelis to physically meet in the context of restrictions on movement etc.

### ***Palestinian-Palestinian Dialogue***

The Jerusalem Center for Women aims to increase activities with Palestinian women throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the year 2001 in order to bridge gaps and enhance dialogue between those women living in the occupied territory and those living within Israel or East Jerusalem. These activities will serve to address the separation that has occurred between these women and will foster better unity between them.

It is intended to run two workshops during 2001 and to address a series of issues including feminism and nationalism, women and the economy, the role of women's organizations in the political establishment etc.

### ***Women's Empowerment for Political Participation***

Activities in this area constitute a major area in the work of the JCW as they are aimed at empowering young women to become effective participants in Palestinian nation-building processes incorporating the values and principles of democracy and human rights. During the year 2001, the Center will recruit a number of women to participate in training projects on civic education and human rights, democracy and human rights.

### ***Voice Therapy***

The impact of the worsening situation on Palestinian women has been dramatic. Women of all ages have suffered from aggression, harassment, eviction, the destruction of their homes and the loss of loved ones. Women, as mothers and wives, spend most of their time at home and shoulder the main responsibility for protecting their children who are in constant danger. In these important roles they presently live a situation of impotency and despair.

In an attempt to relieve their suffering and help them move on with their lives, a voice therapy program will be initiated in 2001 aimed at allowing women to voice their suffering in a protected, group situation and, through group counseling help them to gain a perspective on their lives. The program will also aim to document the stories of these

women.

### ***Reaching out to the World***

The Jerusalem Center for Women will continue to network with partners for peace and empowerment around the world in 2001.

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