

**Jerusalem Center for Women**  
**Annual Report 2001**

## **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 2001**

The realities of Palestinian life during the year 2001 affected every sector of the society, impacting on Palestinians both on the individual and collective level. Pain, anger, poverty and humiliation were widespread and intense, linked to the siege imposed on the areas occupied in 1967, to the shelling of homes and official buildings, to house demolitions, to economic sanctions, to the closure and most of all to the killing of loved ones and the unrecoverable injuries of many. Women more than others suffer the brunt of this turmoil. They live under harsh economic constraints, often becoming homeless and having to take care of families after their loved ones have been killed, injured, or jailed.

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.

Because our primary goal is that of raising the status of women in Palestinian society, we continue our work with Palestinian young and adult women despite the present political turmoil. We believe that the struggle for collective political rights should not obstruct the struggle for individual and collective social rights. Thus when joint Palestinian-Israeli projects and activities were halted, those addressing the Palestinian community were increased. Work in the area of Jerusalem has again been stressed as the main target area (as stipulated by the Board of Directors in their meeting on 11 June 2001), and our work has indeed been almost totally shifted towards Jerusalem – Al Quds.

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

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

From the start of the second Intifada through most of 2001 joint Palestinian-Israeli peace work was in crisis. The Israeli groups of the "peace camp" were unable to address the Palestinian Intifada as a nation's struggle for liberation from occupation. Many Israeli peace and human rights groups looked at it as a violent attack on Israelis who seek peace through negotiations. JCW, like many other Palestinian organizations, realized that it had become necessary to work within a clear political framework. Because Bat Shalom was unable to take a clear public position on all issues, joint activities with Bat Shalom were frozen though dialogue continued between members of the Board of Directors and the staff of the two organizations which comprise the Jerusalem Link.

Towards the end of 2001 there was an increase in the dialogue between JCW and various Israeli peace groups and especially Bat Shalom. The Palestinian side had given a clear message that trust-building measures had to come from the Israeli side if joint projects and activities were to be resumed. After considerable debate there was a positive

response from the Israeli side through louder and stronger protest activities against occupation, aggression and war crimes. In the same context, Bat Shalom asked the JCW for a clearer position concerning the martyrdom suicide bombings. JCW stressed that it is against any deliberate action to harm innocent civilians, whether they be Israelis or Palestinians.

These steps paved the way for internal meetings to evaluate the situation, to identify ways in which cooperation might be resumed. During the evaluation process JCW and Bat Shalom agreed on the need to create an authentic and effective Palestinian-Israeli women's leadership initiative that entails the following elements:

1) Examination and evaluation of expectations and performance of past initiatives are pre-requested for developing a new joint initiative to allow for both improvement and healing. Among the important points raised in this context are:

- lack of a certain degree of trust/consistency/attention to cultural competency and differences
- lack of transparency re: expectations or agenda
- need for common definition of terms like peace, security, negotiations, etc.
- working from under political party constraints and pressures
- paralysis when violence escalates or formal negotiations break-down
- role and socio-political location of Palestinian citizens of Israel
- in-depth discussion on the structure and dimensions of violence
- acknowledging asymmetry exists but not devising accommodations for power imbalance
- no contingency plan when we get stuck (ex. right of return)

2) Justification of joint initiative: grounded in the belief that women must be involved at all levels (from grassroots to policymaking framework) of the socio-political discourse of peace. Elements to work on:

- defining a women's politic and alternative approach
- forging new channels of communication that move into and emerge from our communities, developing agreements that are rooted in the needs/rights, concerns and values of the people across ethnic, religious, national and cultural divides
- developing an Israeli-Palestinian dialectic that should stimulate, challenge and provide what each side needs to advance its independent agenda
- articulating a "mutual contract" or guidelines that incorporates historic joint declarations
- commitment to recruiting and sharing power with young women

3) Action plan includes:

- engagement with an advocacy in the international arena to support co-existence and cooperation between equals in two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel
- defining role of international community as authentic allies
- developing local joint movement for peace

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

These activities aim to bring together Palestinian women living in the West Bank with those living in Israel with a view towards identifying and understanding their different realities and manifesting their national unity as Palestinian women despite the dispersion, expulsion and separation which the Palestinian nation has experienced.

During the year 2001 two workshops were run by JCW in cooperation with the Kayan Center, a Palestinian women's feminist organization in Haifa. Their goals were:

- To familiarize one group with the other in terms of life styles, outlook and political perspectives.
- To reduce the emotional gap and perceived stereotypes between the two groups.
- To research and identify common issues and points of departure.

The following issues were identified for discussion:

- Feminism and nationalism
- Women, sexual emancipation and cultural peculiarities
- Women, feminism and the economy
- Women, women's organizations and their relationship to the political establishment
- Palestinian women's organizations and their relationship to Israeli women's organizations

The workshops were held in East Jerusalem, the first discussing "Feminism and Nationalism in the Palestinian Women's Discourse" and the second "The Relationship between the Women's Movement, Political Parties and the Political Establishment". Seventeen women (twelve from the West Bank and five from Galilee) participated in the first workshop and 16 in the second (closure of Ramallah). In both sessions, the impact of the Intifada on the minds and hearts of the participants made it difficult to focus the discussion. As a result the discussion was wide ranging, touching many aspects of the constraints to women's participation in the political processes.

### ***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, 130 women (students, teachers, activists and housewives) participated in training projects on civic education and human rights, democracy and human rights, and advocacy and an advocacy campaign was undertaken which involved a wider public. The overall objectives of the training are:

- 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 training was run in cooperation with the YWCA, the Spafford Organization, Shu'fat Women's Center, Qalandia Women's Center and Al Quds University in Abu Dis.

The work in this area was carried out under three separate projects, each with a slightly different focus which combined covered human rights, democracy, advocacy and gender issues. All included the teaching of communication skills which would enable women to move towards positions of leadership in the community and participation in the political process.

The training on human rights was geared towards raising the level of awareness of participants on the issues of both their rights as individuals and their collective rights as Palestinians. There was some disappointment among participants as they recognized that under current conditions they were in fact deprived of most of their rights. But as the project moves into its second phase it is expected that they will begin to come to terms with the gap which exists between the rights which they can expect and the present reality, and hopefully they will gradually become empowered to support the forces of change.

In the area of human rights advocacy, a public campaign entitled “No Security with Settlements” was designed and implemented. This campaign was the final event of one of the largest and longest of the JCW training projects. The women who participated have been given communication skills and training in self assertiveness and lobbying, and they researched the impact which the settlements in the Old City of Jerusalem have had on the lives of women. Included in the preparatory work for the campaign was a self tour to settlement points in the Old City, visits to families which had lost their houses or which were threatened by the loss of their houses to settlers, meeting with youth groups to discuss the impact of the settlements on their daily life and documenting the stories of the women affected. In preparing the campaign itself they met with a designer to discuss the format for a poster and supervised its publication and helped to organize a public event held in the Spafford Institute in the Old City which was attended by several prominent people (Hatem Abdul Qader-Palestinian Legislative Council member, Amal Khreisheh-member of JCW board, Ya'qub Odeh-Human Rights activist) and by the public. This proved to be a unique experience which contributed greatly to the process of empowerment of the women who participated.

Finally, in the area of civic education and democracy, training was carried out in Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus and Hebron with a view to enhancing the role of women in the process of building the Palestinian state. Although the activities were affected by the turmoil which affected living and working conditions in most areas, and by a lack of security which worsened as the year progressed, the participants were nevertheless highly motivated to complete the training and to organize follow-up workshops. The work continued into a second phase of the project focusing on marginalized groups in

marginalized areas. Activities began in October 2001 with four groups: at the Shu'fat Refugee Camp, at Al-Quds University in Abu-Dis, at the Qalandia Refugee Camp and in the Old City of Jerusalem. Reflecting the severe deterioration of security, the first and second groups were given packages of material which included, among others, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights documents and brochures entitled "Know Your Rights in Case of Imprisonment" and "How to Combat ID Confiscation".

### ***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 was 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 also aimed to document the stories of these women.

Three groups of women from the Old City of Jerusalem and environs, comprising 48 participants, met in 14 sessions over a period of almost 6 months. The three groups were named: Mothers at War Time, Mothers of Martyrs and Young Females at War Time. Through the sessions and the counseling received, the women had the opportunity to voice their suffering and to discover the inner conflicts which arose as a result of family, society and political pressures. They shared coping techniques and experienced woman-to-woman support which proved to be of great value.

It was requested, and agreed, that there be follow-up meetings with the therapist who ran the groups. An article on this experience focusing on the stories of mothers of martyrs will be published in English and Arabic, as will summaries of the groups' proceedings, conclusions, and the stories of the mothers of martyrs. The article will be the first of its kind done during the current Intifada. Group worker in the project Dr. Nadera Kevorkian.

### **4. JCW involvement in Palestinian coalitions**

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 participates 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. Among the activities undertaken were training for psychologists and social workers who provide crisis counseling, visits to the families of victims documenting their cases, and organizing guided tours around the walled city of

Jerusalem to observe the results of 34 years of occupation.

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

JCW networks with the following international organizations including the Women Waging Peace Program, Global Fund for Women and the NOVIB Democracy Network.

In addition, the JCW participated in several international initiatives including:

-A conference on "Women - Ethnicity - Nationality, a Female view on Borders, Conflicts and Community Relations" sponsored by the Frauenform/Forum delle Donne in Bolzano, Italy.

-A conference on "Armed Men and Women in Conflict", sponsored by the University Institute of Development Studies in Geneva at which a paper entitled "Palestinian-Israeli Women's Peace Initiatives and Power Relations" was presented and subsequently published in the proceedings of the Conference.

-Meet journalists, delegations and fact-finding missions to present the perspective of Palestinian women to friends, allies and interested audiences throughout the world.

-Build relations with and participate in the activities of various

### **What JCW expects for 2002**

A peace building program will be initiated which will include training in conflict resolution techniques, roundtable discussions meetings which will examine the experience of joint Palestinian-Israeli peace work and the prospect for the future, active participation in the national and bi-national debate on how to restore and develop joint work for just peace, and peaceful resistance action against the occupation and its discriminatory policies.

Joint and separate activities will be undertaken in cooperation with Israeli peace and human rights group which share our political framework and goals, and will be geared towards ending the occupation, equality and justice. In view of the opening which has taken place in the dialogue with Bat Shalom, we are convinced that political dialogue within the Jerusalem link will bring us closer to reaching a common position over difficult issues like that of refugees, paving the way for a resumption of joint activities.

Out of our belief that we cannot make the needed changes alone, we seek to build an international women's coalition for peace. This would include all those who agree with the political vision which we share, whether they are Palestinian, Israeli or international. The training programs focusing on democracy, human rights, advocacy and grassroots mobilization will continue. Five groups of 25 participants each are planned and at the end of the training there will be a number of social and political advocacy campaigns.

Empowerment will be enhanced by providing participants in training programs with the opportunity to do voluntary work at various women's and human rights organization.

The Palestinian-Palestinian Dialogue program (Iitiqa) will continue to bring together women living in the West bank/Palestine and in the Galilee/Israel.

Female youth leadership. It is intended to revive the female youth leadership program which functioned in 1998. This program will consist of training and exchange components and will be based on JCW's previous experience in this area enhanced by that of other Palestinian organizations which have been working in the same field.

Voice therapy. Follow-up meetings will be held with the participants in the 2001 program and an article on the experience and a booklet relating the stories of the women will be prepared. In addition, three new groups will be formed under a project entitled "Sharing and Dealing with Loss". Under this project three groups of mothers and wives of imprisoned men, a total of 40-50 women, will meet in 12-14 sessions in Shu'fat Refugee Camp and in other parts of Jerusalem. The aim is to help these women and their families cope with the loss and unknown destiny of their loved ones and document their stories and empower them to defend their rights and the rights of their families.

Venues will be provided for women to voice their feelings, perspectives and initiatives.

Cooperative work will be undertaken with YWCA, Orient House, the Ministry of NGO affairs and Al-Quds University, among others, to develop strategies to uplift voluntarism in Jerusalem. Activities within the Palestinian coalitions will continue as will participation in other activities at the national, regional and international level.

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