

Jerusalem Center for Women

Annual Report 2003

Jerusalem Center for Women
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The Jerusalem Center for Women

Based on previous developments in political dialogue, prominent Israeli and Palestinian peace activists met in Brussels in 1989. The first official meeting led to an on-going dialogue that in 1994 resulted in the establishment of the Jerusalem Link—comprised of two women’s organizations—the Jerusalem Center for Women on the Palestinian side and Bat Shalom on the Israeli side. Linked through their coordinating body, the two centers operate independently, maintaining executive and organizational integrity. This arrangement represents 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 toward a just 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 of just peace. The underlying context for JCW’s work is the dual nature of the struggle in which Palestinians are currently engaged: 1) the national political struggle for independence and the right to self-determination; 2) the struggle to create a democratic civil society based on respect for the law, equality, social justice, 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 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, build a just peace, and constantly develop new strategies to promote the status of women.

JCW’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 peace based on justice
- Establishment of local and international networks supporting JCW in its goals.

The Year 2003

Despite severe curtailments of travel and meetings, JCW successfully mounted new initiatives during the year 2003, in particular a International Women’s Commission, and offered exciting new training projects.

Since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa /Independence Intifada, Palestinian civilian life has been disturbed by Israeli reoccupation and siege of Palestinian cities and villages. The population has become imprisoned inside cantons surrounded by checkpoints at every end and endures frequent closures and curfews. During 2003, intensive construction continued on the Apartheid wall, which separates Palestinians from their land and from each other. Under such circumstances, Palestinians try to continue their daily lives, coping as best they can by helping each other and finding alternative ways for survival. Under these circumstances, JCW also continues to work. At times, we had difficulties in reaching the target group, and sometimes they also had problems in reaching us. The checkpoints prevented some participants from taking part in training programs. Also during 2003, war against Iraq was waged, and Palestinians were fearful of the possibility that Israel might take advantage of the situation. Inevitably, training sessions were delayed during this period.

International Initiatives

Women's International Peace Activist Network

The purpose of our International Women's Peace Activist Network (WIPAN) is to link hands, as we have done here in the Middle East, with women peace activists in other parts of the world. It is our intention to use our collective power and moral force to build a model of mutual trust and support in the face of the violence and ongoing harm to the lives of women and their families. Also, WIPAN's aim is to raise values of justice, respect for human rights, peace, and peaceful means to solve conflicts through a women's initiative that is not restricted only to women. We plan to develop pressure groups which can effectively advocate and exert international pressure for an end to the Israeli occupation and lobby for significant women's leadership roles in the peace-making and peace-keeping process. To become our core partners, JCW and Bat Shalom have identified 15 organizations/persons, who are committed to the process of peace building and /or are working on empowering and improving the status of women. Our Network Establishment Working Meeting will take place in March 2004 in Jerusalem. Together we hope to achieve the following:

- Foster international solidarity in the form of delegations, declarations, political advocacy, petitions, demonstrations, non-violent direct actions, mutually cooperative projects, and advocacy for women's participation in any future negotiations.
- Share resources, human, financial and media. Use the power and efficacy of authentic alliances among peace activists to strengthen and support each other.
- Focus our energy and attention on the desperate situation in the Middle East, with the understanding that in time and in turn, JCW, Bat Shalom, and other members of the network will offer solidarity and support to women and men in other countries who are coping with ongoing crisis.

International Women's Commission

Despite the fact that over the years, Palestinian and Israeli women have developed a model of political dialogue and contributed significantly to peace-making efforts on both sides of the conflict, we are absent in political decision-making processes. Women have no voice in the negotiations related to our conflict, and are excluded by international bodies and states. To this end, we have urged the UN (Office of Gender Affairs) and the EU recognize and support the establishment of an on-going tripartite women's commission of empowered women of Israel, Palestine and the International Community. This

International Women's Commission (IWC), mandated with an oversight/advisory mission, will offer a vital gender perspective in ending the occupation, peace-making, peace-keeping, and foreign policy. An IWC will be one of the means to include a major sector of civil society on both sides in the formal process of peace-making.

IWC objectives are as follows:

1. Provide a women's perspective, voice, and experience to all peace-planning and peace-making negotiations;
2. Provide measures and principles to enable and facilitate constructive engagement and sustainable objective-driven political dialogue/negotiations;
3. Ensure that the needs and issues of women affected by the Palestine-Israel conflict are raised and effectively addressed (as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325).
4. Ensure that the appropriate frameworks and mechanisms are in place for ending the occupation and building a sustainable peace and eventual reconciliation process. IWC will contribute to a process of building a new kind of relationship that excludes all forms of discrimination;
5. Ensure popular participation in, legitimacy, and acceptability of agreement/s to be signed from legal and political perspectives.

Each side will select its participants based upon the political and personal standards and criteria determined by its own members, along with women of credibility and standing from the international community. The political principles of the Jerusalem Link will constitute the foundation of this joint initiative. In the next year, we will be working to build further local and international legitimacy for the IWC initiative.

Bi- National Dialogue

An increased climate of fear evolved as war became imminent in Iraq. Thus it became essential to continue joint Palestinian-Israeli dialogue with Bat Shalom and together to maintain an alternative voice promoting sound approaches for a just peace.

Joint Board Meeting with Bat Shalom

On May 17, a joint meeting was held at the Notre Dame Hotel with the JCW Board of Directors and the Bat Shalom Board of Directors – the first in three years, since the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada and the Israeli physical reoccupation of major cities. Among the prominent speakers and participants were Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Zahira Kamal, and Salwa Hdeib-Qannam on the Palestinian side and Dr. Naomi Chazan and Galia Golan from the Israeli side. Presentations and discussions covered the topics of Political Development and the Road Map, Respective Difficulties in Israeli and Palestinian Societies, Locating the Jerusalem Link (evaluation of current status, location, and achievements; vision for continuing partnership). The joint boards also addressed initiatives involving right of return discussion, joint rallies, and delegations to embassies and the IWC. A number of decisions were taken jointly:

1. Build a concrete media strategy to make women's voices more visible.
2. Widen the circle of members; include local and international supporters and friends.
3. Reach out to and include more young women.
4. Open channels of communication and build partnerships in North America.
5. Establish three committees:
 - One. JL Local Initiative Sub-Committee to plan public correspondence, videos, seminars, joint demonstrations...
 - Two. JL International Initiative Sub-Committee to build international support for JCW advocacy program and the IWC.

Three. JL Political Sub-Committee to build strategies for vertical and horizontal relations.

Joint Declaration as part of the Public political correspondence

program.

Prior to the Iraq War, JCW and Bat Shalom published in Al Quds and Al Ha'aretz newspapers, and also released to international organizations, a joint declaration calling attention to Israeli policies of Transfer-Coercion. Together, we called for international intervention to hold Israel accountable for the consequences of the separation wall, extension of the settlements, land confiscation and other incremental acts of collective punishment: "It is the role of individual states to pressure the Israeli government to stop its oppressive measures of occupation using all possible means as part of their bilateral relations. Also, it is the role of individual states to work collectively with other member states of the international community and use international bodies to develop collective mechanisms to protect Palestinian civilians."

Vigils

Beginning in summer 2003, JCW and Bat Shalom held a number of vigils as part of an ongoing initiative called "Women for Ending Occupation." The first, a silent vigil held at the New Gate, was attended by 35 Palestinian and Israeli women holding signs with slogans, including "Apartheid-Ghetto System Will Not Bring Security," "No Peace Without Release of Prisoners," "Occupation = Terror," "Back to the '67 Borders," and "International Protection for the Palestinian People. On June 4, a joint demonstration took place at Qalandia checkpoint, attended by approximately 50 Israeli and Palestinian women. Due to security measures which restrict Israeli citizens from accessing the West Bank and Gaza strip, Israeli women were not allowed to pass through the checkpoint; thus, the demonstration took place on both sides of the checkpoint and attracted media attention. The purpose of these vigils was to raise a strong united voice against the occupation. This alliance provides a public model for cooperation, demonstrating the possibility of reaching an understanding between Israelis and Palestinians that can lead to a just and lasting peace.

Conflict Resolution Techniques Training program

The goal of this program is to empower 20 young women (ages 20-35) to become effective participants in Palestinian nation-building processes incorporating the values and principles of democracy, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution. By offering them both tools and alternative ways of confronting social and political conflicts, JCW hopes also to impact others in their families, voluntary organizations, and workplaces. During 72 training hours over a period of four months, facilitators will cover fourteen topics: Conflict Management and the Social Sciences, Peace vs. National and Bi-national conflict, Non-Violent Communication, Majority-Minority Relations, Equality of Rights vs. Conflicting Rights, Cultural Diversity, Language of Democracy, Conflict Resolution Techniques, Democratic Community and Democratic Solutions, Tolerance and Progressiveness, Right to Association and Expression, Decision by Compromise, Need for Agreement, and Sustainable Conflict Management. The program began in December and will continue through March 2004. A roundtable discussion will take place at the end of each month. At the end of the four months, an Advocacy Day for Peace will be arranged to present a synopsis of training and roundtable discussions and decide on a poster theme to design and print for public use.

Women's Empowerment for Political Participation

Because Palestinian women are living in a situation where they are deprived of civil rights, JCW offers them education about their collective and their individual rights. The goal is to activate, mobilize, and empower them to participate in those nation-building processes which incorporate democratic values and principles of human rights. Specific training programs focusing on democracy, human rights, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization continue to be offered. JCW tries to tailor each program to the needs of particular groups and participants' backgrounds. Communication skills are central to all of the programs. In addition, practical aspects are addressed, including field tours, campaigns, meetings with representatives of organizations, to train women and enable them to move towards positions of community leadership as well as to participate in political processes.

From Grassroots to Decision-Making

A fourteen-month program, divided into three phases, "From Grassroots to Decision-Making," empowers young women to become community activists, introduces gender awareness into discourse of democracy and human rights, and enhances the participation of women in political life at all levels. Three groups of young women from the Jerusalem area completed the first phase, begun in February and ending in May: 20 from the YWCA, 45 from Biddo village, and 35 from Al-Quds University. Phase one—task 2 - (28 hours) topics included Communication Skills, Concept and History of Human Rights, Gender and Social Reality in the Middle East, UN Instruments on Human Rights, Implementation of Human Rights and Legal/Political Bodies, Humanitarian Law, and a visit to a local human rights organization.

Topics covered in phase one—task 3- (32 hours) included Civil and Political rights; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Overview of Feminism; History and Development of the Palestinian Women's Movement; History, Principles, and Values of Democracy; Democracy and Human Rights; Women and Legislation; Non-Governmental Organizations; and a visit to a local woman's organization. Of the one hundred participants, fifty were interested and chosen to continue with the project.

Phase two continued in August and June, respectively, with two groups: one at the Al-Quds University campus and one at the Women's Club in Biddo. Workshop topics (64 hours) included Democracy and Human Rights (in-depth), Violence Against Women, Non-Violent Resistance, Women in Development, Women and the Economy, Advocacy and Lobbying for Community Development, Human Rights within Political Realities, Political Participation and the Peace Process, Legislation and Women, Israeli Human Rights Violations. Their Effect on Women, Community Organization and Initiatives for Women's Empowerment, Women's Rights in Social and National Struggles, Palestinian-Israeli Peace Initiatives, Conflict Management and Resolution Techniques, ID-Card Confiscation, and Initiatives to Combat Israeli Violations of Human Rights. This phase, completed in November, included visits to two women's NGO's, as well as a field tour in the Jerusalem area with a focus on Israeli settlements.

During phase three, beginning in December, the continuing participants, who number forty, began to apply what they had learned thus far through a practical exercise: running a community organization activity/campaign. During this phase (12 hours), they are learning how to plan and develop a community campaign. They gain experience working

in teams, researching an advocacy issue, and preparing a poster and brochure. At the end of this phase, participants from each group will arrange a public meeting presenting their findings and voicing women's view on the issue selected for the campaign. Prior to the day of each public meeting, ads will be published in local newspapers about the campaign and inviting the community of Jerusalem to attend the meeting. The third phase will end in late February 2004.

Public Presentation and Communication Skills Training

Beginning in October 2002, eighteen participants, NGO workers and university students/graduates aged 20 -36, from Jerusalem and nearby West Bank villages, gathered at the JCW office for training in phase one of public presentation work offered by journalists, and Bir Zeit faculty in nine sessions. Topics included Introduction to Public Relations Theory, Introduction to Feature Story Writing and News Writing, Press Release Writing, and Public Speaking. Phase two, offered by a professor/producer and a camera man from Al-Quds Educational TV, consisted of Introduction to Audio Visual Media, Press Release Presentation in Front of the Camera, and Interview Technique. Twelve participants were invited to continue on with phase three of the project, which began in March and ended in September 2003, and dealt with Training of Trainer Techniques, Writing and Editing the Newsletter, and actual hands-on workshops with youth groups. Three different youth groups, two from PYALARA (Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation): 27 girls and boys ages 15-18 from Jerusalem and a group of 10 (same ages) from Ramallah.; and a group of 20 young women trainees ages 18-24 at Shufat Refugee Camp. The workshops were beneficial for both the groups and participants, reaffirming the idea of community activism.

Training for Participation in Public Forums and International Peace Conferences

Because the circle of women attending international conferences and representing Palestinians in various forums remains very much closed and includes an older generation, JCW believes that it is important to work with and train young women activists to prepare them for such activities. With the help of local women's, human rights, youth and other non-governmental organizations, as well as political parties, we were able to recruit twenty participants between the ages of 22-35, each of whom were nominated by their organizations to participate in the training. From January through July, the group met Saturday mornings from 9:30 to 12.30 at the Faisal Hussaini Foundation. Attendance averaged 16 at each session; a total of 17 completed the training. With the skills gained, these women will have better chances for representing themselves, their organizations, and the Palestinian people.

Topics, presented by academic and skilled professional trainers, included Political and Diplomatic History of the Palestine-Israeli Conflict (both pre- and post-1993); Legal Aspects of the Conflict and International Law; Political Analysis of Present Conditions of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and Occupation; History and Present Conditions of Palestinian and Israeli Peace and Anti-Occupation Activism (particularly women's activism); Introduction to International Diplomacy; Other International Conflicts (with South Africa as a case study and model for political activism); Theory and Practice of Conflict Resolution. Local speakers shared their experiences on previous international conferences and how to prepare for them, while international guests and speakers explained how to make a dynamic presentation and how to dress. Other topics included Conflict Resolution Mechanisms from a Woman's Perspective, Writing Presentation

Papers, Communication Skills, Facilitation and Moderation Techniques, and How to Act in Front of a Camera. A conference simulation gave participants an opportunity to prepare and carry out conference presentations. During the implementation of the project, a number of participants traveled abroad to attend conferences and were able to put into practice skills acquired from their training. All felt they had benefited, especially from work on communication skills.

Human Rights and Advocacy

Empowerment for Activism: Women with Political Prisoners in Their Families

More than 7000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli occupation prisons include 77 women and 13 female children, who are held in Naveh Tritsa Ramla prison under harsh conditions, which violate all international conventions concerning prisoners' rights. Moreover, their families are denied many rights and are in need of moral and legal support. This project is designed to empower and support women and child prisoners by reaching out to them, listening to them, empowering them morally and legally by raising their awareness of their rights inside prison. Also, we support prisoners' families through awareness raising and counseling. Thirty-two visits to female political prisoners have been conducted by the JCW lawyer, who faces deliberate delays by Israeli prison authorities. Sixteen reports describing circumstances of imprisonment and treatment inside the prison have been published in the Al-Ayyam newspaper about sixteen different prisoners; some prisoners, however, are reluctant to have their personal narratives published. A letter was also sent to President Arafat, Prime Minister Abbas, and the Minister of Detainees asking them to include the female prisoners' release on the list of priorities with which to pressure the Israeli government.

Palestinian female prisoners do not receive basic education in Taveh Tritsa prison, despite the fact that Defense for Children International had obtained a ruling that obligates the Israeli prison authorities to provide this basic right to the female prisoners. Israeli prison authorities also prevented six of nine applications for the Tawjihi (high school certificate) exam from being submitted. Our experience has shown that there is a need for better data collection about prisoners and their families, as the information from governmental and human rights organizations is not accurate or complete. Meetings with prisoners' families revealed that prison authorities permit only parents, and no other members of the family, to visit prisoners even in cases where parents are dead or too old. Relatives also face harassment by Israeli soldiers when entering the prison and experience long hours waiting in queues. One meeting with prisoners' families was videotaped in part so as to document that part of the project for a future documentary video. In 2004, we will arrange more meetings with prisoners' families and continue preparations to advocate and lobby for young prisoners' right to education. Also we will help families get their voice and demands heard.

Human Resource Development

Capacity Building Training (in cooperation with Arab Student Aid International)
Because very few NGO's employ women on the level of project managers, we believe that it is important to empower women further and offer them training in four different aspects of project management: Time Management, Project Monitoring and Evaluation, Facilitation of National and Bi-National Groups, and Preparing and Running Successful

Meetings. The eighteen participants (ages 24-35) occupy positions in local Palestinian NGO's in the Jerusalem area. Fourteen actually completed the forty-hour course over a period of three months, beginning in April, and they expressed appreciation for the format of this short, focused course aimed at developing their skills. They believe there is a need for more training in management skills, communication skills, public relations, advocacy, lobbying and report writing. JCW believes that the project has empowered the participants to move ahead with their careers and with community-oriented activities.

Conferences and Awards

Participation in International Gatherings

JCW personnel and board members accepted a number of invitations to speak at and attend significant international conferences during 2003, although we had to turn down many others.

To begin the year, Executive Director Amneh Badran attended the Global Fund for Women Regional Advisory meeting on 15-16 January in Istanbul, Turkey. To celebrate International Women's Day, on 12 March, Huda Imam, JCW Board Member, attended a meeting on "Women, Peace and Security" in Crete, Greece. Natasha Khalidi, Public Relations Officer, traveled to Belgium from 4-11 April to participate in "Platform of Action for Palestine" sponsored by a coalition of NGO's working on North-South solidarity and peace. Amneh Badran made a presentation at the 8th Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum, in Chania, Greece, held 1-4 May, for a workshop entitled "Peaceful Solutions, Intercultural Dialogue and Coexistence in Conflict Areas." Amneh Badran, attended a meeting on 15-16 July with international civil society organizations at the UN in Geneva, entitled "Pre-requisites of Palestinian Economic Recovery – the Role of the International Community;" participants included representatives of donor countries and UN agencies involved in assistance projects.

A friend of JCW, Rawan Sharaf, attended on our behalf a regional training seminar on "New Tactics in Human Rights Struggle" from 4 to 7 September in Istanbul, Turkey, organized by the Helsinki Citizens Association. Along with Amal Khreisheh-Barghuthi of the JCW Board, Amneh Badran joined with Israeli partners from Bat Shalom to meet with Baroness Symons, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and with women Members of Parliament from both the Commons and the House of Lords, in London from 7-12 September. Natasha Khalidi represented JCW at the Women in Black Conference in Italy from September 27-31. Amneh Badran traveled to Washington, DC on 8-9 October to serve as primary discussant on the topic of "Recovering from Violent Conflict: Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction," at the International Conference of the Women's Learning Partnership, "Clash or Consensus: Gender and Security in a Globalized World." Natasha Khalidi went to Bilbao, Spain from 16-19 October to attend an International Conference of Palestinian, Israeli and European Social Movements: "For the Rights of the Palestinian People." Finally, from November 17-20, Amneh Badran attended the Oxfam International Conference in Northern Ireland.

Award

The Dialogue on Diversity (USA) conferred the 2003 Liberty Award on Amneh Daoud Badran "in recognition of her courageous and creative work for the cause of Conciliation and Human Rights." The award was presented in Washington, DC on October 8, in conjunction with the "Clash or Consensus" conference sponsored by the Women's Learning Partnership.

What JCW Expects to do in 2004:

Because 2004 will mark the tenth anniversary of Jerusalem Center for Women, we will develop special events and initiatives to commemorate it.