"To be at a Political position is a serving assignment more that an honorary one and what so called the political position is always a task of service nationally recognized for the development of the Palestinian community"

Rabbiha Diab: Palestinian women achievement is highly noted, but continue in her demand to be empowered with her eyes focused for a better future.

Special for "Musharakah":
Real and active participation at all levels and at all times was the motive we have been仙女citizens going under an exceptional circumstances, and in spite of the contextual historical dynamics the area went through our nation managed to write on the same page. Today, when addressing reality of the Palestinian women achievement, we must stress that what we see, and recognize is not ultimately the end of women’s quest for empowerment; what had been achieved was not to be without the participation and leadership of the Palestinian Feminist Leaders whom paid a huge tax to secure what they believe in where they detained, house arrest and threatened.

Rabbiha Diab is one of the active pioneers who recognized the important role of the Palestinian women; Rabbiha is one of the elite who took it upon themselves to organize women’s social efforts under the Palestinian context to intensify the feminist movement act and makes it more realized on the ground. Ms. Diab had a clear imprint in feminist work and significant achievements in terms of women’s rights in the Israeli occupation for seven times and spent nearly seven years in detention, also was prevented from travelling for more than 19 years, but her faith in the justice of the cause as a Palestinian, and her general belief in the ability of women to stand and accomplish empowerment whatever the circumstances inspired her journey even after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Diab history talks about her; where she contributed in the establishment of several well-known national centers and institutions at Palestinian, and had a prominent role on the social, economic and political Palestinian arena by assuming several important national positions, which she served as Minister of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, not forgetting to a membership of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and was one of the founders of the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club and currently heads the Association of Women’s Committees for Social Work (AWCSW).

Five years, a milestone in the history of MoWA (Palestinian Ministry of Women’s Affairs)
Diab says “The fact that we are not talking about a short period spent in the Ministry, I have continued my work as Minister for five years in a row, and it was for me, an important assignment that led the Ministry to a quantum leap, my first step as a minister was to call for the Ministers Cabinet to approve the gender-sensitive budget and to MoWA, in a mean to introduce such budgeting at all aspects of governmental departments, that in addition to the adoption of strategies that serve the Palestinian women”. She adds “As a minister at MoWA I had the chance to introduced strategic plans at the general governmental plan then to each ministry separately, and in order to implement such plans funds had to be secured from sources other than international donors, here it is necessary to emphasize the Palestinian government is recognized as a state and women sector should be part of the general state budget especially at each ministry.”

For that a national committee was formed after acknowledging the completion of the (National cross-sectoral gender strategy) and how to introduce women rights to all fields, and to combat violence against women. Ms. Diab demanded the formation of a special national committee to supervise such sensitive budgets to include members from the different concerned ministries and civil society organizations, in order to ensure that these funds are working in serving the Palestinian women, adding to that is consid- ering drafting a Palestinian Penal Code that is gender sensitive not forgetting to establish the territories still fall under the control of Jordanian Penal laws and regulations that is not taking into account Article 340 relating to excuse and mitigating circumstances relating to the issues of honor killings;

Diab has contributed through her leadership of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in the formation of constituent units of gender at various other ministries, and at this point is extending to include the various national security agencies. MoWA under the leadership of Rabbiha Diab during the past five years was able to establish many achievements at the regional, national and international levels despite the political contextual situation and the occupation.

Excellent relations with partners:
When Ms. Diab entered the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the relationship between the ministry and the acting women’s organizations was not existent, the first step Ms. Diab toke and at the first chance she invited all women’s organizations and the General Union of Women’s and started to rectify the relationship where any decision to be taken by MoWA would not take place unless women’s organizations are present and familiar with, involving them at all aspects of networking and partners- nerships in a participatory integrative relationship. Diab asserts that since many years and until the present day, the work is characterized by extensive coordination between the various factions of women’s institutions. Now, each institution has concerns but all operate under the banner of the General Union of Palestinian Women, just as the case with factions working under the banner of the Palestinian Authority.

Quota system and the bet on changing the culture of our community:
Regarding the reality of women participation in political and social life Ms. Rabbiha says “The struggle still continue to achieve what is best for the Palestinian women and their future require- ments of development where the “quota” was a step and an input to bring about change at the stereotypical thinking that prevails in the Palestinian society. Diab recalls the first law passed after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority regarding elections, in which gave women the right not only to vote but also to run for elections, a huge accomplishment while we see other independent States wom- en still suffers from oppression and injustice and not given their rightful roles in their society.

She asserts that women in Palestine succeeded in writing success stories despite their extraordinary reality, they entered the Legisla- tive Council at the first legislative elections, not forgetting the de- ceased Samiha Khalil ran for presidential elections against the late President Martyr Yasser Arafat, came as a testimony for what em- powered women can accomplish.

We also have female members of parliament and as ambassadors whom are very successful, ministers, governor and deputy govern- nors as bright names, we have the President of the Capital Market Authority and chairman of the Central Bureau of Statistics, and we also have female judges. Therefore, it must be emphasized that we have accomplished and evolved in the right direction, still we are aware that the road is still at the beginning to achieve the best. The quota is a mechanism to intervene in favor of increased female participation, we are required to work in two directions: A concert- ed efforts through training and rehabilitation, empowerment and awareness of women and men, in order to address imbalance in our society and to educate young people about equality and that women be given an opportunity to make achievements.

The other direction is within the Palestinian political system, the previous governments all agreed to respect gender sensitivity and the 30% quota per female representation forward to women all in her favor, as noted when signed, “CEDAW” agreement even before announcing Palestine as an independent state which was and this is a quantum leap for better and moving in the right way.

The 30% quota proportion
As for the quota proportion, the feminist movement stressed the Palestinian women should not forget what was established in the global standards, in addition and officially the Ministry of Women Affairs raised an explanatory memorandum addressing the Council of Min- isters requesting to make a decision to raise the proportion of the quota to 30% and to submit the request to the Palestinian President in order to issue a decree to amend the local elections laws. Ms Rabbiha Diab personally met the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in regards where he expressed his consent and approval in regards within the legal procedures.

Rabbiha Diab “My task is not yet complete”
After years of work and struggle, Ms. Rabbiha Diab says “Before I became a minister, and after I finished my ministerial duties I’m still a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the head of AWCSW and co-founder of several institutions and centers, and the founders of the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club and assuming many different regulatory political positions, I considered MoWA as an important ministerial duty and struggled to achieve new accom- plishments for women. Now, after the ministry will stay as I am, present in all areas that require my support towards women equality and rights.

So far Ms. Diab did not set her mind to run for the upcoming elec- tions, she says “Talking about it to be premature, but I see in myself that I have the ability to add more, the idea is not distant or imposs- ible, and until this moment I have not decided whether or not to run for the election.”

Cancelling mitigating circumstances in cases of women murder
Ms. Rabbiha Diab sees that President Mahmoud Abbas’ decision cancelling mitigating circumstances in cases of women murder would have a huge effect and she adds “To whatever degree socio- ties are developed, and to whatever its laws are civilized , they can- not cancel crimes, however, that the cancelation of mitigating cir- cumstances means reduction in crime against women, then no doubt that this decision was the right one.

Ms. Rabbiha Diab concludes her words “ We are moving in the right direction, there are many achievements that we must build on, and we should not start each time from scratch, Palestinian women are able to be on an equal foot with men, that proven with an enormous potential for adaptation to all circumstances, women should gain all the respect, as any community that is half paralyzed will never ever succeed”. She stressed the need for women to be present in all areas and not to limit her in agriculture or home, the Palestinian women had a big role throughout the historic marals of Palestinians and cannot be marginalized or excluded.

Association of Women Committees for Social Work
Our overall mission is to attain gender-equality in a democratic Palestinian society, to which end we focus our efforts on promoting the social, educational, economical, and political development of Palestinian women. We also spend great effort in raising the legal awareness of women, in order to promote their participation in decision-making processes, to protect their rights and to encourage development.
A special course on "Methods of writing and drafting of projects with its budgets construction"  

A series of workshops to increase in the awareness and regulations of the local government Municipalities  

A conclusion of a series of follow-up meetings to determine community needs for ten Palestinian villages

Meeting at Al Quds Open University in Ramallah to discuss the women's political empowerment program outputs

News and Activities

Projects to support the Palestinian national efforts, the importance of female representation at the Students Affair Council and in summary highlighted the amount of aid and grants presented to students every year internally and externally; explaining the subject of raising the premium importance of women's representation in the University policy and openness to the discussion and collaboration with the Palestinian society especially its working non-profit institutions that serves the public interest. Projects of discussing reached about 34 subjects, addressing various aspects of the services offered by the university for its student. Mr. Shabaneh replied to the various questions, explaining all the points that have emerged and summarizing all aspects of services provided by Al-Quds Open University for its students, and presenting a full set of numbers and statistics as examples supporting his answers. Subsequently, a group of members pertaining to the student tuition fees, the grants process and students aid, also highlighted the attendance workbooked at the student community and the university facilities, mentioning the importance of female representation at the Students Affairs Council.

With a delegation from AWCSW and Student Council Affairs from Al Quds Open University a meeting was held that at the office of university Deanship in Ramallah to discuss the outcomes of the women empowerment program implemented by AWCSW, the meeting was attended university Dean Dr. Mohammed Shabaneh in the presence of Students affairs representative and AWCSW coordinators associated with the targeted villages elected female council members from the program targeted areas.

The meeting came to discuss the presented young active students’ needs identified by the program women forum meetings notes in targeted villages, here the meeting was attended Dean Dr. Abu Shaeneen and by the participation of the University policy and openness to the discussion and collaboration with the Palestinian society especially its working non-profit institutions that serve the public interest.

This comes as a series of awareness raising workshops in the way to empower women in political and public life, with funding from the Fund for Gender Equality and Women's empowerment at the United Nations.

Workshops had been facilitated by the legal expert Advocate Mrs. Halima Abu Soft, that notably provided the target audience with the necessary knowledge, foundations and basic rules of law governing Palestinian local councils, all in the way to support councils in their decision making process of their community-based programs that are directly related to the identified needs of the targeted areas.

The awareness series conducted under the methodology and techniques of adult education, participation and community building, by using writing and drafting of projects that reflects the Palestinian context especially when looking at the reality of the social and economic burdens at Palestine. All that not forgetting the historical context of local councils in Palestine, such as the basic Palestinian law and that of local council’s reality testimonials and case studies. These sessions where part of AWCSW program built to strengthen women's participation in political and public life, with funding from the Fund for Gender Equality and Women's empowerment at the United Nations. All in the way of Palestinian empowerment initiatives and to enhance the process of organizing the national efforts and energies.

A series of follow-up meetings to determine community needs for ten Palestinian villages

AWCSW concluded a series of workshops addressing awareness regarding laws and regulations governing the work of the local municipalities council, the sessions highlighted the legal constitutional, financial and technical laws founded by the Ministry of Local Government.

The workshops take place at two provinces of Ramallah and Jenin.

Workshops attended by 50 participants from members of the village local councils at 10 communities, and several activists from the community in addition to coordinators from the Ministry of Local Government.

This program has continued over the past two years, targeting women at ten Palestinian villages from community activists and leaders of the population at the provinces of Ramallah and Jenin.
Program Coordinator Hanan Sabbah

AWCSW Program “Enhancing Women Participation in Political and Public Life” is a vital tributary program to women achievements

For a special “post” to Musharaka Magazine – The coordinator Mrs. Hanan Sabbah points that AWCSW consistently aims at strengthening the role of women all over Palestinian territories in a way to strengthen them and build experiences to fulfill their part in development. Mechanisms varied according to AWCSW work in empowerment of women in a way to supplying her with all kinds of knowledge that she can utilize wherever she at. Among such mechanisms was the delivery of capacity enhancement tools under the program named “Enhancing Women Participation in Political and Public Life”, a program aiming to strengthen women’s participation at her community that is funded by the Fund of Gender Equality - United Nations for Women’s empowerment.

Hanan Sabbah - the program coordinator - says “The project began in 2012 and will end in December 2014, implemented in the governorates of Ramallah and Jenin, targeting ten community villages of Kharbatba Al-Musabah, Kharbatba Banani Hartith, Beit Sira, Beit Ur al-Tahta, saffa, Yamoun, Slat Harthiya, Borqeen, Fahma and Kaf Raaee.

Going back to the program’s beginning Mrs. Sabbah says “Our point of entry into the target villages was through the elected village local councils and municipalities; were AWCSW selected a set of direct beneficiaries at the beginning within a targeted active groups of women leaders and about 40 young activists from university students all each villages in the two provinces or Ramallah and Jenin, as well as women of the community elected local council members’.

Selection of the program direct beneficiaries was voluntary and through filling AWCSW membership forms; and as noted the members identified within the categories of elected female council members, women leader at the community level and young activists of university students, all considered as direct beneficiaries for the program to build their capacity through variety activities though young activists were given a separate capacity building training when assessed for their needs and interests in life.

Capacity building and skills enhancement tools utilized by the program addressed a set of topics including gender awareness, leadership, building budgets, voluntarism, communication and networking, lobbying and advocacy, effective communication. These topics given to women leaders and elected female council members, while young activists and university students were given a more specific training on communication and participatory leadership, due to the identified differences in needs.

Mrs. Sabbah continue “Later the direct beneficiaries collectively went under different topics of capacity enhancement such as how to build alliances and to form networks, a step towards one of the program objectives in forming social networks at the community levels that resulted in establishing CPWP’s “Committees to Promote Women’s Participation” that consists of several divisions of community Advocacy members 12-22 individuals at each locality consisting of activists from local councils (Male or female) as well as members and heads of grassroots organizations in the village in addition to the elected women members and university students. A Sub-Committee CPWP at a higher level established that its members nominated by the advocacy groups but in a smaller scale consisting of two female members from the elected councils as well as one community leader, one young activist and one of the CBO representing at each village”.

At a Higher level came the supporting Advisory Committee - according to Mrs. Sabbah - which consisted of nominated representatives from the Ministry of Local Governance, Ministry of Women’s Affairs in addition to the elected women members from the direct program beneficiaries, and representatives of institutions working and handling women’s empowerment such as the Women Affairs Committee, Women’s Center for Legal and Social Aid, the Working Women Association, the Rural Women Development Association and nearly 12 other institution.

During the second year of the program life, beneficiaries went under more specific capacity enhancement training over subjects like writing project concepts and budgets building that to be followed by an initiative to grant and fund projects that help in enhancing women empowerment at each targeted village in an amount of three thousand dollars supporting community initiatives that will serves the largest class of the community.

Mrs. Sabbah referred to the diversity of the initiatives to be submitted by each locality that the program will support of which most was about socio-political-economic empowerment of women and infrastructure basic development among other identified priorities, all that enabled the program reach the final stage of capacity building in which addressed training in advocacy and media utilization in a belief that media plays a significant role in women empowerment.

As for the topics raised at the media training, circled over what is the media concepts in general and its effects and how to deal with it and use it effectively, why/how we need to utilize the media to empower women in our community politically, economically to raise and stress our needs and our women issues?

The Utilizing Media capacity training participants at the training did came up with a Media plans that address the most prominent 6 needs within each of the ten targeted villages, needs like adding classrooms or build a public park or a park for children, where each locality is to utilize and employ their built media plan to address their identified specific needs. Notably, what interested participants to undergo such training was the lack of knowledge on how to invite media backs.

The training addressed several topics like how to invite the media to cover any news, lobbying and advocacy and its importance in achieving the needs that came out of the local communities, how to utilize media campaigns, lobbying and advocacy, as well as instructions on how to use the media in general. The coordinator Hanan Sabbah points to the overwhelming response and broad participation by the targeted community females, also other community citizens officially were asking AWCSW to be involved in sessions coordinated and held by the Association since the result of the program intervention and the outputs up to this point was positive.
Eman Abu Ali a local Council Member a model of an experienced Palestinian women pioneer in the fight against corruption.

The fight against corruption is a global trend in this modern era, corruption eats away the body of communities and the best way to fight it by involving everyone's participation especially when women stand in the war against it to upright our community. Palestinian women in Palestine has always been spearheaded in fighting corruption and in defending the public interests of its community especially after the advent of the Palestinian Authority women had a leading role in that, despite the difficulties to prove herself she achieved success after success and etched her name on one more than one panel of honor.

“Eman Abu Ali” walking a path from being a membership of the local municipal council to participating in solving the problems of her own town. This success story is presenting us an extraordinary heroine woman whom took upon herself a burden to protect the assets of her hometown and its people uncaring for the consequences for the be the first woman locked in an open war against corruption and the corrupt.

Eman Abu Ali a former captive at the Israeli prisons, a housewife and a mother for a boy and girl, a school teacher, living in the town of Yamoun at the governorate of Jenin; an energized enthusiastic women that led her to be elected within the local village council in 2006 talks about her working experience and says: “My experience in the municipal council has started in 2006 when I entered the first stage of the elections, and as it was my first experience I had the full support from my husband and my family, and after entering the council board I had the chance to one of the active leaders in the town council, personally I have had a professional relationships with those responsible especially parties from the local government, my participation was at the level of staffing and as a treasurer in the municipal council in my even less as to the citizen’s needs in the community.

She adds “Through my work in the municipality, I had the chance to gain further capacity and skills through AWCSW program and was able to help in assessing and providing actions to some of my community urgent needs; one example was establishing a school’s classrooms in addition to a computer lab and providing different aid to some students, all that was summed in our networking success in the opening of an elementary girls school branch the area named “Al-Hicheyyin” in Yamoun town of a population estimated at 20,000 inhabitants”.

Also she adds “The new branch of the school was a necessity because of the accumulation of problems faced by the students, from several cases of girl harassment and the high number of drop-outs of young girls, opening a new school branch was not to be meant without the networking and cooperation with our local community and partners such as AWCSW”.

Service community means also protecting it from corruption.

Eman Abu Ali success story was not limited to her role at the school or at the municipal council only, but also was demonstrated by revelation of a corruption case at “Yamoun” municipal council where her insistence and pursuance uncovered a internal financial corrupt cases despite the fact that such corruption was manifested at the council for many years and took her a long time to uncover and present it with proofs.

The story is the case of the Municipal Council of Yamoun’s project of the building provided by AWCSW program.

Story details is told by Eman, she says “Since the year 1998, I was aware that there is something wrong at the municipality engineering department, and when I entered the Council at the first round of elections in 2006, I was surprised by the role and authority of the mayor, who was weak and lacks management skills besides the will to improve and serve Yamoun community, his lack of competence extended to different sections and departments at the council, while we – members – were focusing and stressing the need to supervise and audit the work of the municipality staff “handed over” to their work plans weekly or daily and to provide a summary of the accomplished work, but blocking our entry and supervision to sections prompted us to ask for help from the Ministry of local government, though the MoLG tried to cut-briefed the matters and referred it to the jurisdiction of the mayor”.

Eman obsession did not stop and her faith engine led her search for the truth, at this point she adds “In the second session in the year 2012, I was determined to investigate the engineering department problems, at that time we formed a special commission named (Engineering Commission) where one of my colleagues at the council was enthusiastic and always emphasized that there was thefts occurring at the department in amounts exceeding a million shekels.”

She tried through the Engineering Commission to reveal and find out the dilemma in cooperated with the council treasurer who confirmed his cooperation, at the Commission first meeting the mayor attacking the members by yelling and Cursing in the the presence of the council Engineer; at that point Eman forwarded her speech to the mayor: “All what we need is to access the engineering department to schedule files and find out the debts and dues of municipality”, at this point the Mayor declined, Eman and the commission members did not kept silent introduced the subject during the official Yamoun municipality meeting presenting the fact that the Mayor always attack men who comes it transparency and integrity, where denied it at the time.

Quest for the truth pushed Eman Abu Ali to move forward as determined by engendering the cooperation of the municipal staff, and at this year (2014) confirmed the pursuit of the problem knowledge, and in April 2014 the facts have been escalating to a conflict between himself and the Mayor whom tried to attack her physically.

Shutting around to the Ministry of local government with the support of AWCSW “Association of Women’s Committees for Social Work”

According to Abu Ali she presented a complaint to the Ministry of Local Governance MoLG and went presenting her case with her colleagues to lady Rabiba Diab (Minister of the Ministry of Women Affairs MoWA) and AWCSW whom provided her with all the support needed, and petitioned with 8 other members through legal channels for the Ministry to decide on the issue. “After advocating for the issue the MoLG in Ramallah called upon all of Yamoun council members including the President” she says, where an investigation took place at the time regarding the corruption, threats and verbal abuse suffered by Eman.

Unfortunately, the Mayor assistant apologized to Eman for the Mayor abuse, and tried to fix the subject by turning to appear as a personal conflict, which was highly rejected by Eman and the other 8 members of the council confirming - at the time - that there was no personal problem or issues between Eman and the Mayor, pertaining the matters to the general public interest of Yamoun village, Eman and the council members asked to commission an inspection Committee to oversight the engineers the council municipality and find out what is going on there.

The Case

The case Yamoun municipality is summarizing by the issue of financial corruption (Theft) found under falsifying financial charge receipts by the engineer department that varied in dates going back from the year 2002 until 2014, the thefts amounted estimated more than 3 million shekels.

At the time Ministry of Local Government did not deal with the subject in the form required or needed, Eman went to the Prevention Security Service “PSS” and the Institutions Security Department “ISD” who accept and followed her petition revealing the truth and proving the corruption and the occurrence of theft.

Eman strongly believed in the people's right to coach and relay my experience to others, my gained skills allowed me to serve my country for many years and took her a long time to uncover and present it with proofs.

The fraud in receipts - according to Eman Abu Ali was found in the discrepancies between the carbonated paper copies of the receipt and the original paper, for example, a citizen comes to authorize something and pays the amount of 2,038 JD where the Eng. should write a receipt of the amount to the payer, here the carbonated paper presented to the council treasurer indicates a written amount of only 38 dinars, but the white piece presented to the paper indicates an adds amount of 2,000 dinars, all of which are written on fake financial books that do not differ from the originals. This was found in addition to the engineer (the defendant in the case) found to sign for the space observer/engraver and others (Forgery), also the accused toke from citizens sums of money without any receipts for the amounts paid, here when things started to unfolded when citizens tried to claim the amounts they paid denied receiving any.

Threat and intimidation

Eman received several intimidation and threatening messages on her phones and notebook for her and her family stating that what she did will not pass unnoticed and will be retribution and pay the price. Regardless, Eman assures and confirms her belief that women can protect society from corruption where they can do their part to its fullest, even more than what is expected of them if given the opportunity, the relationship from the perspective of Eman is integrative and our community cannot thrive and develops without gender equality.

AWCSW “Association of Women’s Committees for Social Work”

According to Eman, after defending herself in the municipal court of Yamoun, the Mayor was imprisoned for five days before being released on bail, while the engineer still a prisoner of the Security Services Department where the court refused to release him on bail.

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