

ANERA ²⁵ years of service Newsletter

American Near East Refugee Aid

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PALESTINIAN WOMEN *at the Crossroads*



Mrs. Violette Yacub Sabat began as an apprentice at a draper's shop in Bethlehem, earning wages hardly sufficient to make ends meet. She is a widow with two daughters age 10 and 12, who worked diligently to feed and educate her children, hoping to give them a life better than her own. In an ANERA-supported training course, she learned to make curtains and hangings, a business much sought in town. In 1989, she received a loan from the ANERA-supported Bethlehem Charitable Society to invest in material and a sewing machine. Today, the loan is fully repaid and Violette has a shop of her own with a steady clientele.

In the absence of government, in the midst of military occupation and the *intifada*, and in the name of nationalism and self-determination, Palestinian women have played a unique role in the economic and political fabric of the West Bank and Gaza Strip over the past 50 years. But due to factors which limit their empowerment, success stories like that of Mrs. Sabat

remain uncommon among Palestinian women today.

Due to the high rate of imprisonment, injury, death and job emigration among Palestinian men during occupation and the *intifada*, a high percentage of households in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are headed by women. A Palestinian woman is often much more than a mother, daughter, wife, or sister. She is also a teacher, nurse, primary source of income, elderly care provider, and role model. Palestinian women often volunteer their time in community-based programs, or engage in informal, unstructured employment. Despite the significant economic impact, such work is rarely included in national employment and labor statistics.

Today, Palestinian women are at the crossroads of a new era. As prospects for Middle East peace enable Palestinians to construct their economic and political future, there is concern that women will be left out of the process. Although many in society are ready for change, cultural constraints remain rigid.

In the Middle East, these constraints are both socially and legally based. They include: discriminatory employment practices, lack of access to credit, lower educational standards, a social tradition of early marriage and child birth, and restrictions placed on freedom of movement.

Politically, Palestinian women are seriously under-represented. Those that do participate do not hold upper-level, decision-making positions. When Palestinian President Yasser Arafat selected his cabinet this year, the lack of participation by women in the new government became evident. Of the seventeen cabinet posts, only one woman, Minister of Social Affairs Intisar Al-Wazir, was appointed. A recent United Nations Development Program report claims that "women's participation in the decision-making process in law, health, education, labor organizations and financial institutions is almost non-existent." Of the thirty-four technical committees established during the transition to self-rule, women were again under-represented. Their presence was relegated to the Technical Committee for Women's Affairs, which receives no funding support, and does not participate in the work of the other committees.

The situation in the economic and social sectors is equally discouraging. Again, while women are seriously under-represented in leadership positions, they have played a significant role in the informal sector in the economy — a rich

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Women working at the Gaza Sewing and Knitting Cooperative.

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and diverse network of non-profit education, health and welfare organizations. Though international aid for large-scale projects is important to the region's future, the continued support of small-scale development is essential. Efforts must be taken to ensure the continued participation of women in these fields, as well as in traditionally male-oriented fields such as science, agriculture, law and politics.

Following this philosophy, ANERA has always sought to integrate women in the planning and implementation of its projects. In fact, women must be included in the design and implementation of projects as a formal requirement for ANERA support. ANERA recognizes that by empowering women, a host of broader social and economic issues such as population control, health care, education and economic development can be addressed. A recent report by the development consortium InterAction shows that "educated women are more likely to delay marriage and plan their families. They have fewer children, who in turn receive better health care and are more likely to succeed in school." A study of 88 nations showed that "literacy gains of 20-30 percent boosted the gross domestic product by 8 to 16 percent." On average, only 69% of Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip, and 57% of those in the West Bank, are literate.

Education and Job Training

The field of education and training, normally administered by governments, has been severely crippled during military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

ANERA supports several organizations which are managed by women and for women — which successfully fill the unique needs of the communities they serve. For instance, the Gaza-based **Palestinian Women's Union**, directed by Ms. Yusra al-Barberi, operates a series of centers in Gaza City, Khan Younis, Rafah, and Deir al-Balah. Their goal is to raise the social, cultural, health and economic standards of women. Each center offers vocational training courses and workshops for women in sewing, literacy and health education. The centers educate over 500 children in nurseries and kindergartens, which also provides valuable assistance to working mothers.

Similarly, the **Women's Work Charitable Society** in Hebron, managed by Ms. Nawal Zakkout, conducts training courses for poor, rural women in food production. The Center is seeking funds to add a women's library, offering international and regional information on topics related to women. Another group, the **Women's Graduate Society**, operates a children's library, and a library of general public interest.

Financial Services

In the absence of banks or loan associations, ANERA also sponsors several revolving loan programs which are managed by cooperative organizations in the region. Legal and social barriers often impede a woman's access to credit. These ANERA-supported, not-for-profit programs enable Palestinian women like Violette Sabat to acquire the necessary funds to start or expand their businesses. The cooperatives provide loans of between \$3,000 and \$5,000, made in stages or by progressive payments which further increase the likelihood of repayment. ANERA also provides training for credit managers to assess risk and monitor repayment.

Health Care and Rehabilitation

Health care is another sector which has been devastated by regional politics. Many visitors to the West Bank and Gaza Strip are struck by the severity of health-related conditions such as low-birth weight, infant mortality rates, malnutrition and low rates of vaccination. This situation is especially discouraging when compared to the superior standards inside Israel.

To address such needs, ANERA provides both technical and financial assistance to many small to medium size health care

projects. **The Arab Orthodox Society for the Relief of the Sick**, in Jerusalem, for example, is operated primarily by women, and provides comprehensive medical care and social services to the most impoverished Arab residents of the Old City. The clinic provides diagnostic, gynecological, pre-natal and obstetric services, and has recently introduced plans to offer ultrasound and mammography services.

For the thousands of Gazan children suffering from psychological trauma brought on by military occupation and violence, **The Free Thought and Culture Association for the Women's Committees** offers an unique drama-therapy program.

"In fact, women must be included in the design and implementation of projects as a formal requirement for ANERA support."

For children between the ages of 11 and 14, the center offers a two-year program in drama therapy, designed to encourage children to express their fears and confront their experiences in a non-threatening environment. The center, run by Majida Al Sakka, continues to receive ANERA assistance in designing and expanding their programs.

Empowerment of Women

There are also several organizations which help to empower women and raise gender consciousness in Palestinian society. One such group, the **Women's Affairs Center**, in Gaza, runs different activities such as training courses for leaders of women's movements. **The Center for Legal and Social Awareness** in Jerusalem similarly offers educational and public awareness courses on a wide array of women's issues.

At the Crossroads

Today, Palestinian women have more potential and opportunity than ever before. It is clear that organizations such as the few highlighted here have laid the foundations for participation by women in the economic and political development of the region. But without proper cultivation, the future of

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Monthly Giving...Made Easy

Many thanks to our friends and supporters who have already joined our electronic monthly giving program. If you are one of ANERA's thoughtful monthly contributors, or if you are able to contribute more than once a year, we now have an easier way for you to do so. ANERA's Peace Plan is our new and improved system for monthly giving, designed to make giving easier for you and to save administrative costs.

Here's how you join ANERA's Peace Plan. Decide how much you'd like to contribute each month. We've suggested some amounts on the coupon below. Then send us the coupon and your check for your first monthly gift.

Note: at this time we cannot apply monthly gifts to scholarships. We will let you know if this becomes an option to you at a later date.

We take care of the rest. Each month, your bank will automatically transfer the amount from your account and send it to ANERA. Donations will be clearly listed on your bank statement each month. Of course you are under no obligation. You can choose to change or cancel your monthly donation at any time.

Not only does the plan make donating to ANERA quick and easy, it also helps to lower ANERA's already low administrative overhead costs because your bank makes the donations for you automatically.

Thank you for considering this exciting new plan — you will be amazed at the difference a personal commitment like this can make. ■

Yes, I want to join ANERA's Peace Plan.

Here is my monthly gift of:

\$54 \$36 \$27 \$14 Other \$ _____

*Scholarship Gifts Excluded

I authorize my bank to transfer the amount above from my account each month. A record of each contribution will appear on my bank statement and serve as my receipt. I understand that I may stop my contribution at any time, by contacting ANERA at 1522 K St., NW Suite 202, Washington, DC 20005-1270, (202) 347-2558, or my bank.

Signature _____

Date _____

I have enclosed a check for my first monthly contribution, made payable to ANERA.



Edward Manchester Legacy

ANERA would like to express its gratitude for the long-term support of the late Edward Manchester for ANERA's work, and for his recent generous bequest. From 1927 to 1930, Mr. Manchester served on the faculty of the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. During that time he developed a great interest in the Middle East, and a life-long commitment to the welfare of its people. We are honored by his enduring generosity and concern, and we are saddened by his loss. ■

Best wishes to *David Payne* for a full and speedy recovery.

Continued from page 2

such participation is in jeopardy. Your support can make all the difference in ensuring this success.

Recent peace agreements, and increased international attention to the region offer greater hope for the future. The time has come for policy-makers to decide whether Palestinian women will help usher in a new era of women's rights in the Middle East, or whether they will retain second-class status as in other neighboring countries. Palestinian women are truly at a crossroads. They face the difficult task of continuing to assert their gains in the midst of change, while respecting religious and cultural traditions. We hope that this opportunity does not pass them by. ■



YES, I want to help ANERA's projects in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Lebanon

_____ \$10,000 and above: Builders

_____ \$2,500 to \$9,999: Benefactors

_____ \$1,000 to \$2,499: Sponsors

_____ \$500 to \$999: Sustainers

_____ \$250 to \$499: Creators

_____ I would like to learn more about funding a special project through ANERA.

Contributions of \$250 or more to this year's Annual Fund will be recognized by category in ANERA's Annual Report (FY95). Further recognition opportunities exist for large, special project gifts.

- General Programs
- Gaza Renewal Fund
- Lebanon Relief Fund
- Scholarship:

I would like to provide a one year scholarship (\$100 per child) for a:

- Palestinian child
- Lebanese child
- School where need is greatest

Sponsors receive a photo of the child and letters from the child's school during the year.

_____ \$200 _____ \$100 _____ \$75 _____ \$50 _____ \$35 _____ \$25 Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

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Americans Support Foreign Aid

As some in Congress discuss reducing or eliminating foreign assistance programs, the results of a recent independent study are especially significant. The study found strong support among Americans for maintaining foreign aid at current levels or higher. The nation-wide study was conducted in January 1995 by the Program of International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) of the University of Maryland. Of the 801 Americans polled, the study found:

- * 80% agreed that "the United States should be willing to share at least a small portion of its wealth with those in the world who are in great need."
- * On average, the American public *thinks* that the U.S. spends 14% of the federal budget on foreign aid. The *actual* amount is less than 1% percent.
- * When informed about the actual amount of spending on foreign aid, 62% support maintaining or increasing current levels.
- * Among all types of foreign aid, the American public shows the greatest support for humanitarian relief or development assistance that directly helps the poor in developing countries. Popular programs include child survival, disaster relief, the Peace Corps, family planning, economic development and protection of the environment. Of those polled, 75% support maintaining or increasing funding for these programs. ■

In Tribute/Honor of . . .

Betty Ashooh ■ Samuel J. Dempsey
■ Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Ferris ■ Grace Guthrie ■ Ms. Evelyn Sanders ■ Shirley Sawabini ■ Dr. and Mrs. Wadi Sawabini ■ Harry and Marie Schwary ■ Dr. Joseph Tamari ■ Dr. Paul J. Ward ■ Desmond Tutu ■ Dr. Richard S. Ward ■

In Memory of . . .

Cynthia and Vibert Bindah ■ Bob and Jean Boling ■ Eldon B. Cole ■ Dr. John Davis ■ Mr. and Mrs. Simon Estfan ■ Margaret D. Garrett ■ Steven P. Grand ■ Lestor F. Hills ■ Verna Metzger ■ Daniel B. Street, M.D. ■ Theodora and Farid Tabri ■ Clyde W. Wyant ■ The victims of the Oklahoma City bombing ■

Correction . . .

Mr. and Mrs. David Dodge appeared incorrectly in the memorial gift section of our last Newsletter. We received a donation in their honor, **not** in their memory. We are happy to report that they are alive and well and we apologize for the error.

ANERA

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At ANERA we are concerned about the proliferation of junk mail. However, mail is a very economical way to reach new people. For this reason we occasionally trade our mailing list with similar humanitarian organizations, although we never rent or sell our names. If you wish to have your name removed from this list, please let us know in writing.

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