

A wretched people

Imam Ghazali said: "All good manners on earth stem from courage and virtue. Courage represented in boldness, i.e. taking action, versus virtue represented in restraint, i.e. taking no action. Between these two lie bewilderment, hesitation, success and failure, concern and indifference. The tears of hurt feelings also dwell in that instance where weakness is born and will later grow and be termed helplessness. Helplessness is born in the womb of our wretched people, not because we are weak, but because we are unfortunate and God loves the unfortunate. For the sake of accuracy and to avoid misunderstanding, the definition of wretched is kind people who are fused with goodness: strong and defiant, patient and resilient, they withstand and adapt. Molded with the ability to give, give everything by every means possible, from sacrificing their souls, their money and children to achieve silence, crying and citing: "Sufficient for us is Allah, and [HE is] the best Disposer of affairs".

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The Paris Meeting: Efforts that produced the promise of an international peace conference!

Rami Hajjaj

Despite their expectations, Palestinian politicians did not react by more than "blaming" the final statement issued by the Paris consultative meeting. The meeting was organized by France to discuss ways of getting Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table and to look into the possibility of calling for an international peace conference by the end of this year.

The official statement from Paris confirmed that the meeting took place with representatives from 28 states and from the Arab League, the European Union, and the United Nations. The meeting was a sharing of ideas that ended by stressing the need to move forward with the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by returning to the bilateral negotiations that stalled two years ago, especially as the future of the two-state solution is seriously under threat.

Delegates at the meeting discussed ways to avoid this danger and the prospects of achieving peace before all hopes for a solution disappear. They discussed the "economic incentives" and "security guarantees" to push the two sides to revive peace talks, and skipped over the most negative elements of "escalation on the ground" and the "expansion of settlements", according to the joint statement issued on Friday night.

The French Foreign Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, stated that the two-state solution must be saved and called in a press conference following the meeting for urgent action to revive negotiations based on that solution before it is too late.

It seems that the end of this year is not seen as too late, despite the continued "violence" and "settlement". Ayrault's statement expresses his country's intention to call for an international peace conference in early 2017.

However, the end of 2016 will not arrive with a magic wand, nor will the planned conference be able to produce miracles. Notably, the foreign ministers participating in the Paris meeting stressed that the two-state solution that

could bring security and stability must be achieved through direct negotiations between the two parties to the conflict.

Yet, the two parties have not been invited to the Paris meeting. France, the sponsor state, was satisfied with sending its peace envoy to the region to meet officials from both sides and brief them on the results of the meeting, which fell considerably short of Palestinian goals of a declaration of a clear framework and timetable for the establishment of the Palestinian state.

This prompted Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad al-Maliki, to accuse the "big players" in the political arena, who he did not name, of undermining the points stipulated in the final statement of the Paris meeting.

Al-Maliki told the French News Agency that those parties are responsible for the absence of many key points in the statement, which Israel has clearly highlighted, because the phrasing of the final statement issued had been toned down in comparison with the original draft.

The Israeli media announced that communications took place between the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders and foreign ministers demanding modifications to the final statement. These [meetings] included US Secretary of State John Kerry, whose country has adopted a less enthusiastic stance towards the French initiative.

PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi told al-Hal that the final statement issued by the Paris meeting of foreign ministers is made up of generalizations and lacks real objectives and a concrete plan of action. However, she expressed her gratitude to France for organizing and sponsoring the meeting.

Ashrawi condemned the statement for treating the Palestinians and Israelis as two equal sides and neglecting the contrast between the power of the occupier and a people under occupation.

Saeb Erekat, Secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, sees



the Paris meeting as a significant step in the right direction and a sign of international consensus in rejecting the status quo.

Erekat urged the United States, Russia and European countries to take the necessary steps to ensure Israeli compliance with international law and end its occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

He confirmed that the Palestinian leadership has proposals that would bring success to the international efforts in Paris and to a fresh peace conference. For example, the formation of working groups of both Israelis and Palestinians, in addition to those of seven states, to monitor the negotiations over final status issues and the implementation of any agreements concluded if Israel does not comply with time frames.

Professor of Regional Studies at al-Quds University, Abdul Majid Sweilem, argues that although the results of the Paris meeting fell short of what was anticipated, they met the expectations of

the Palestinian leadership. Rather, the meeting restarted the momentum of the Palestinian cause in the international arena and focused on international resolutions, the Arab peace initiative and the two-state solution as a way to end the conflict.

Sweilem stressed that the meeting is, in itself, a Palestinian success because Israel, in cooperation with its ally, the US, failed to derail the French initiative.

He ruled out that the recent political intervention by France would have any repercussions on the resolution condemning settlements to be put forward to the UN Security Council, a proposal that was postponed by the Palestinian Authority leadership to avoid any risk to the French initiative.

Khalil Shahin, director of research at the Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies – MASARAT, believes that the Palestinian leadership lost two golden opportunities

to boost its influence in the international community for the adoption of a more effective formula than that issued by the Paris consultative meeting.

He told al-Hal: "If the Palestinian leadership had supported the recent popular uprising and strengthened it to demonstrate that it reflects the crisis in Palestinian status due to stagnation in the political process; and if they had applied the decisions of the PLO Central Council on the political and economic relationship with Israel, the situation would have been different. The international community would then have treated the Palestinian cause and the future of the final solution more seriously."

According to Shahin, the change of course and attempts to seize lost opportunities is no longer possible because the means available to Palestinian political bodies have not altered. They insist on negotiations as the only way to realize the right to an independent state.

How to get out of this crisis

The PLO: Twenty years waiting for the state...Institutions without elections and without a program for struggle



Dr. Ghassan Khatib



Bader Zamareh



Ali Obeidat



Dr. Nader Izzat

Amir Hamouri

With the deterioration in the political situation and the inability of the PLO to impose a new political stage, carry out its commitments or to implement its political program, there is an obvious decline in the confidence of Palestinian society in the PLO and its institutions. According to a statistical survey published by the Arab World for Research and Development-AWRAD, 96% of the West Bank population and 78% of the Gaza Strip population believe that corruption exists in government institutions. In addition, 72% believe that the Palestinian leadership has no strategies to address youth issues and 66% do not agree with the Palestinian government's handling of the teachers' strike. A majority of 51% do not support Palestinian political parties in the West Bank.

Absence of sovereignty of institutions

Nader Izzat, the Director of AWRAD, stated: "The data revealed by the AWRAD opinion poll demonstrates a decline in confidence by Palestinian society in all Palestinian institutions, whether PLO or PA institutions, even partisan groups such as Fatah and Hamas, and even Palestinian leftist parties." He explained that this decline is due to "an accumulation of factors that have led to a loss of credibility in these institutions. Palestinian society has waited a long time for the PLO and Palestinian factions to fulfill their promises and implement political programs on freedom, ending the occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian sovereign state. Its inability to do so during the last two decades is obvious. Although the PA was established on the ground, its authorities are incomplete and it is incapable of controlling its resources, borders, water and other affairs."

Ghassan Khatib, Vice-President for Development and Communications at Birzeit University said: "The PLO bet on the option of negotiations, but Israeli obstinacy led to its failure. Hence the inability of the PLO to fulfill its promise to the public to end the occupation through negotiations."

In this regard, journalist and youth activist Ali Nasr Obeidat said: "Since Oslo, the PLO and the political factions are partners in causing this fragility of the Palestinian position and the loss of hope. There is blurred vision with everyone dragging behind financed projects, whether the PA or foreign institutions, instead of advancing society with all its components to prepare for struggle that will eventually lead to independence."

Lack of confidence in political participation

The director of the Sharek Youth Forum, Bader Zamareh, confirmed that deteriorating economic conditions, high unemployment and poverty rates, and the unequal distribution of wealth leads to a collective retreat from political participation. It also causes mistrust in political parties that are largely under the PLO umbrella and whose role has been completely marginalized after signing the peace agreement. He explained: "The decline in resistance, the multiple political agendas and the transition of the national project to an unstable phase of conflict settlement, have intensified the feeling of the futility of political participation."

Obeidat said: "The decline in the PLO's role for which it was established, i.e. to mobilize and organize the Palestinian people inside and abroad based on a program for struggle to liberate Palestine, is because, since the Oslo agreement, the PLO no longer performs any role in the struggle, not on the frontline directly with Israel, nor in mobilizing the grassroots for permanent confrontation with the occupation. The political factions have retreated and drawn back their political programs, no longer engaging in any political or struggle or even a community role."

He continued: "The Palestinian people have been converted into a group of employees under threat of losing their jobs, hooked to long-term loans and always waiting for their monthly pay. This is not the responsibility of the PA alone but also of other PLO factions who are merely watching from a distance."

Izzat confirmed: "The project to build the Palestinian National Authority should have eventually led to the establishment of a Palestinian state, but this did not happen during the determined period of time. We have been waiting for two decades which, I believe, has resulted in great disappointment. In addition, there is the issue of the political split and the inability of the PLO to draw together the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or even in the diaspora. There is also the inability to defend Palestinians in other areas such as Yarmouk refugee camp or Lebanon."

He added: "The feeling of the public is that the PLO is not one entity and the rivalry of Islamic parties such as Hamas, who have influence and who question the legitimacy of the PLO, and members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) who are also skeptical. This leads to instability in the body of the PLO."

Absent elections

On this reality, Dr. Khatib said: "When the PA took over the management of the PLO, it committed many errors in performance and governance in various stages; this weakened the status of the PLO and its institutions. The absence of PLO National Council elections is preventing confidence from being restored in PLO bodies and contributing to its weakness."

He added: "The divide that occurred between Fatah and Hamas weakened the PLO position because its main strength lies in its united framework encompassing all Palestinians. After the political division, the PLO was no longer united as had been previously and caused this weakness."

What is the solution?

For solutions to save the PLO from decline, Dr. Khatib said: "The Palestinian leadership and society should return to the practice of elections at every level, i.e. for the authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council or the PLO National Council and its affiliated institutions. Holding elections will lead to policies that meet the expectations of the public and bridge the growing gap with the leadership."

Izzat confirms that there are no easy solutions to this issue and says: "This is a historical and structural issue that cannot be resolved without drastic modification and the creation of new bodies to meet the requirements of the conditions we are living in during the 21st century."

He added: "There should be strenuous efforts to raise awareness about real dialogue and to pay more attention to the young generation by taking their opinions seriously and integrating them into any political or social programs."

Obeidat says: "The solution is to restore PLO factions within a strategy of resistance founded on building popular grassroots support on a sound basis. This will restore the standing of public action, which was drained by the transformation of the political factions into shops led by individuals employed and controlled by the PA, and who are committed to its agenda and are penalized for any opposition."

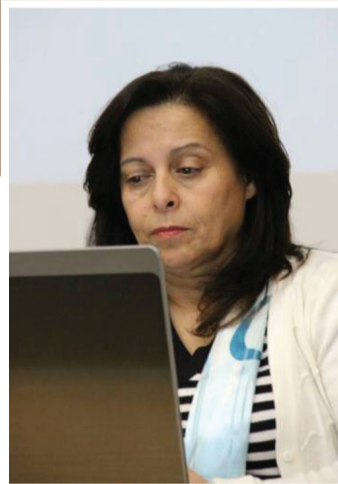
He added: "The role of the PA must be reevaluated and the status of the PLO should be restored as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Palestinian factions should dedicate all efforts to the restoration of struggle based on a real program that restores the hopes of the Palestinian people on a basic level, that is to say the struggle against the occupation."

Real Stories of Tragedies

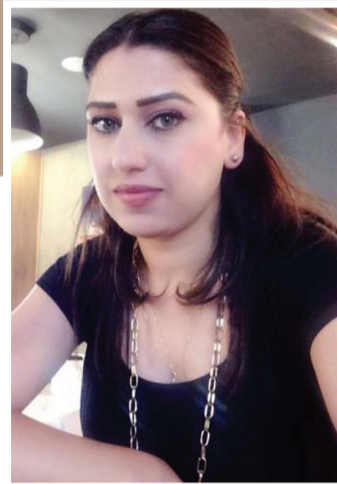
Abused women are victims of unseen violence...safe houses offer a secure refuge



Ola Yasin



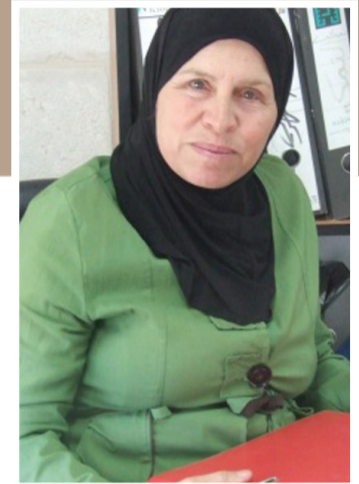
Futna Khalifa



Muntaha Khalil



Nariman Shaqura



Nawal tamimi

Sundus Bueirat

"If violence is a disaster, turning a blind eye to it is a greater disaster." Abused Palestinian women remain victims of violence. What makes the situation even worse is the silence surrounding this issue and surrender to customs and tradition. As the popular saying goes: "Harm under cover is better than a scandal". When will abused women break the silence and put aside their fears by publicizing their cause and experience as a message to those women who still refuse to ask for help because they believe protection is only possible in "silence" in a male-dominated society?

Nawal Tamimi, director of the Protection Department of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Social Affairs told al-Hal: "Abused women request protection in cases that can be described at the very least as inhumane and beyond human endurance. When a woman decides to resort to a safe house, she will have exhausted all other forms of patience and endurance until she becomes desperate to halt the oppression and injustice. Then she will find the safe house as a last resort and only way to a safe life."

Mehwar is the only governmental center that provides refuge, protection and care to abused women over the age of 18, and for married women below this age who are subjected to violence of any form and whose lives are threatened. The Center was established in 2002 with the support of Italian Cooperation in Bethlehem, whose residents accept this concept. Its location was planned to be in Jenin governorate, but that was rejected by the local community.

In addition to Mehwar, there are two other centers: al-Aman safe house in Nablus affiliated to the Family Defense Society, and the Emergency Center in Jericho, established by the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling; all of these are under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The three centers receive cases transferred by partner institutions (family protection departments at police stations, NGOs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the public prosecution) or cases transferred by female counselors in social affairs departments. Twelve counselors are distributed in 11 governorates to provide basic assistance and protection.

Tamimi describes the stages of intervention that start with the counselor receiving the victim and seeking to ease her suffering. The counselor assures the woman that she is in safe hands, that the institution will protect her and provide assistance and care, and assures her of the confidentiality and privacy of all information provided. The level of danger is assessed in cooperation between the counselor and the family protection unit following an interview with the victim of violence and collecting information about her

situation and family to learn the details of what happened. Following this, a first case conference is held to monitor and determine the level of violence and whether it requires a transfer to a safe house or may be treated outside these centers with the assistance of relatives.

Tamimi added: "The abused woman stays at the emergency center for one month. Here she is provided with initial assistance. A decision is taken to release the woman and reintegrate her with her family after ensuring that there is no risk to her life and that the local community is willing to accept her back. If her situation does not allow this, she is transferred to Mehwar Center in Bethlehem or al-Aman safe house in Nablus depending on her circumstances. At one of these centers, a case conference is held with partner institutions to develop intervention mechanisms for services in all aspects (counseling, health, legal in terms of pleading on her behalf in regular and criminal courts, rehabilitation and empowerment) during her stay at the Center for one year or depending on the individual case. The counselor also works with the family of the abused victim to reintegrate her because "the best house for a woman is her home and safe houses are merely a transition to assist her to escape the cycle of violence".

She continues: "The plan of action is accepted by the abused woman and ensures she is no longer in danger, making sure that her family accepts her reintegration. Some women insist on their right to self-determination as a sane adult and insist on leaving the Center despite being exposed to murder. In this event, we refuse to release her because of the conflict between her right to self-determination and her right to life."

Tamimi describes several success stories resulting from the economic empowerment of abused women who have become self-sufficient. For example, the story of M.A. who resorted to a safe house for protection from her husband and her family. She has been empowered economically and is currently working in Bethlehem and living with her eldest son.

Lawyer Ola Yasin of the legal department of the Ministry of Social Affairs described the national mechanism of transferring abused women as takamul (integration). It incorporates a comprehensive multi-sectoral and effective network to support victims of gender-based violence and comprises three protocols that determine the procedures and services that must be provided to women in the health, social, and police sectors. The system includes samples to document cases of victims of violence, the transfer of information, risk assessments, and a guide to institutions that provide services to abused women.

Counseling program coordinator at the Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development (PWWSD), Futna

Khalifa, talked of the role of NGOs in providing protection to abused women. The PWWSD facilitates access by women to justice and to social and psychological equilibrium, combats all forms of violence and aims to achieve equality and social justice in a healthy community that respects the rights of women as a human being.

Khalifa described the PWWSD procedures for abused women who turn up in person at the Society offices or who call the helpline number 1800606060. She specifically referred to the issue of allowing women to make their own decisions and engage in their right to self-determination. The woman must understand the results and repercussions of this decision, particularly if she refuses to take refuge in safe houses and centers. Khalifa explained their method of raising women's awareness of what they can do if they are subjected to violence by discussing a survival plan. This starts with the search for a safe residence with a member of family or close friends to whom the woman may resort in cases of repeated violence. The woman also needs access to a phone to call for help from the police, neighbors or relatives. She must hide all sharp utensils and tools that may be used by the aggressor, and she is encouraged to have her belongings ready if she needs to flee violence and leave her home (official documents, personal ID and those of her children, clothes or medicines). She should go to a nearest location where neighbors can see or hear her and can assist if the aggressor is violent.

Safe houses and protection centers received 131 women and 24 children of abused women in 2015: Mehwar received 26 women and 12 children; al-Aman safe house received 65 women and 5 children; and the emergency center received 40 women and 9 children.

Journalist Noha Khalil believes that alleviation of gender-based violence is through laws and legislation that grant women's rights and prohibit any assault on her dignity as per the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and especially the Penal Code that punishes aggression against women even from within the family such as her husband or any family member.

The head of the Arab relations department at al-Istiqlal University, writer and journalist Nariman Shaqura, confirms the need to raise awareness through intensive campaigns, specifically in marginalized areas through municipalities, village councils, and schools. This would raise the awareness of women of their rights guaranteed in law. Strenuous efforts are required to empower women in all aspects of life and make men and society at large feel that women are important and effective members of the community. Educational programs in various media outlets, both traditional and modern, should raise awareness and expose rights, duties and laws to women and society.

Bride and groom in anticipation

Hana' Fayyad¹

They have been waiting for thirteen years. They overcame all the difficulties over the long years with their ability to wait. They learned patience, their features changed, their faces grew older with age, but they were never defeated.

She visited him wearing pink, and a smile that exposed her crystal teeth. For him, one minute passes like 60 years. He wears the same clothes every time she visits him: a brown shirt and pants as dark as the prison and the oppression of its wardens.

Five minutes, a lifetime for them, the shaking of warm hands, intermittent dialogue revealing eagerness and longing, a souvenir photo for the first time, then the warden screams: visit is over.

The story began in Jenin refugee camp, west of Jenin, where freedom fighters are born. In the alleys of this camp of resistance, Khalil and Sawsan grew up. Khalil Musbah was still a fetus in his mother's womb when his father dies. Later, he assumed the role of a father to support his brothers. When he was thirteen, his mother died after losing a battle against disease and Khalil struggled to support his family in the absence of both parents.

At the age of nineteen, he fell in love with Sawsan Zedan, a seventeen-year-old girl who is now currently an elementary teacher in one of Jenin's villages. Their hearts were bound in love and two rings, and amidst the joy of their families, on the 10th of March 2003.

But the Israeli occupation prevented their love being crowned in a simple house with the birth of children when Khalil was constricted in the darkness of prison. Khalil was arrested two months after their engagement and sentenced to 20 years, 11

months and 29 days; the generosity of the occupation made it one day less than life imprisonment!

The first moments, hours, days, months and years were tough and no one knows the extent of the pain more than Sawsan and Khalil. It has been thirteen years now and there are still seven more years ahead. According to the Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS), 2016 started with 7000 Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, distributed in 22 prisons and detention and interrogation centers, in addition to detainees in the Etzion and Huwarah prisons.

Seven thousand dreams are demolished by the Israeli occupation with disregard for separating loved ones, a father from his dear one, a mother from her daughter, friends from each other...etc. Nevertheless, their dreams are full of hope and the achievement of goals.

Sawsan, who has waited for thirteen years and is willing to wait for the remaining years, says that Khalil suffers from severe intestinal infections because of unhealthy food in prison and medical neglect by the prison administration. His condition deteriorated and he underwent bowel resection surgery. He was sent back to prison before recovery and without antibiotics, resulting in his wound and bowels becoming infected again.

Sawsan stressed that Khalil's health is deteriorating in prison. He underwent surgery to reopen an artery in the neck, conducted for the first time in Israel by three professors at Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba. The doctors had to repeat the operation three times before it succeeded. She added: "Khalil is also allergic to



Khalil is free on the walls of the house and in Sawsan's heart

penicillin. Due to neglect in prison, the doctor did not look at his medical file and he was given two pills of penicillin that endangered his life and he had to be taken to the emergency department. At that time, the news that he had died spread due to the situation prevailing in prison and the condition that other detainees saw Khalil in." Describing her reaction to the news, she said she felt nothing in her heart; perhaps she did but did not show it. However, this internal strength fails her at times and she needs support and someone to lean on to endure the ravages of time. A year after Khalil was arrested, her brother Ahmad Zedan, a close friend of Khalil, was martyred on the 19th of March. He was a brother and a friend.

The brotherly relationship between the two is embodied in the pictures that decorate the walls of Sawsan's parents' house. On the right wall, is a picture of Khalil with his hand under his chin facing Ahmad's picture holding a weapon and wearing a dark green cap. In another picture, they are both hugging.

One day, maybe tomorrow, a wedding picture of Sawsan and Khalil will hang there. Khalil awaits that day as a lifeline when he can breathe freedom. Sawsan says: "Khalil always talks of his longing for freedom and his growing hope with each deal to free detainees. This is the hope of all detainees who are living in deprivation and under the harshest conditions. In the month of Ramadan, they ask about their families with aching hearts and ask what they have for Iftar with longing to be together during such days."

The hope created by Khalil is the spirit of life and a key of patience against the jail and the jailer. As for Sawsan, Khalil's message to her is: your eyes are the color of a rainbow, your skies are very clear, walk him towards the spring even if it is not the season, tell him how beautiful is the spring when you are here, give him your small hand so he forgets how much he is forgotten.

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The Food Train...

meals packed with the taste of freedom is on the streets of Ramallah

Eman Hamed

A brightly colored minibus topped with solar panels is roaming the streets of Ramallah and al-Bireh selling light meals. This is a new innovation by two ex-detainees who learned how to cook while serving sentences in Israeli occupation jails.

Khaldoun Barghouti, who thought of this project together with his prison colleague Abdul Rahman Mimi, says that they opted to use bright colors for what they named the Food Train in an attempt "to forget the dull colors of prison".

The two cooks, Barghouti and Mimi, find comfort in the concept of this mobile restaurant after the long years in which they were deprived of freedom.

Barghouti, who spent nine years in prison, says: "My colleague Abdul Rahman and I learned cooking skills and food preparation when we were making meals in prison for our colleagues in detention. We did our best to change the poor meals provided to us by the prison administration. From that time we started to look for a project to prepare food and provide us with a dignified living after our release."

The Food Train offers light snacks and

meals and is environmentally friendly by using solar energy. The project has achieved remarkable success since it started. People were curious to try it at the beginning, and then it became more popular over time, according to Barghouti. The two ex-detainees did not find it difficult to start the project that they dreamed of and worked for three months to bring the project to fruition. The Commission of Detainees and Ex-detainees Affairs was a major supporter of the project and facilitated a bank loan through a special fund for detainee enterprises.

The two ex-detainees pointed out that the Ministry of Economy supported the project by facilitating a license for the first mobile restaurant in Palestine. The Ministry of Health and Civil Defense were also supportive in facilitating the procedures required.

Barghouti explained that, as with all projects, there were many difficulties at the beginning, mainly because Ramallah and al-Bireh municipalities did not have procedures to deal with a project that was unusual in Palestine. There were also difficulties obtaining raw materials and



other goods because only local Palestinian products are used.

The Food Train operates for about twenty hours a day with Khaldoun and Abdul Rahman alternating with another colleague, who works with them until 3 am, to ensure the success of the project.

Two children stand in front of the Food Train

eating pastries with great appetite, although they are unaware of the secret of the special taste or the story behind it that started behind the bars of prison. That dream is now being realized on four wheels and the owners aspire to grow to a chain of mobile restaurants that go beyond the borders of Ramallah to other regions of the homeland.