

Revolution until Victory

Since time immemorial, poets compose poetry, singers sing, mothers appeal and pray, babies cry: "Revolution...revolution until victory". This is happening and has been happening in Palestine, specifically in Jerusalem, the city that half the earth's population dream of visiting.

It also happens that we join with the earthworm in the herb garden that surrounds our house as we look for what keeps us alive.

In negotiations with the first Canaanite we spoke vocally and without our senses. We said: "This land is ours!"

We may want to call it a state, but its name may remain in our dreams: the paradise.

After all, the most important thing is that its moon stays close to earth to be kissed by Jericho every evening and the hands of the detainees may caress it from the cell that first closed on our joy 69 years ago and has not yet reopened.

The good thing is that we possess the determination to win the state, first in our dreams.

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The President is considering the declaration of the State of Palestine under occupation

Mohammad Yunis

Palestinian officials revealed that President Mahmoud Abbas is preparing to declare the State of Palestine under occupation administered by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) if the United States fails to relaunch negotiations.

Officials also said that President Mahmoud Abbas has become convinced that the American team is incapable of providing a serious peace initiative. He is concerned about the continuation of the status quo that benefits Israel and seeks to change it.

An aide to President Abbas said: "It is obvious that the US peace team, comprising President Trump's advisor, his son-in-law Jared Kushner; the President's envoy for international agreements, Jason Greenblatt; and deputy national security advisor, Dina Powell, seek to apply the Israeli's vision for peace and not that of the US. The new American peace team has abandoned the traditional US position of the two-state solution and seeks a new solution that matches the vision of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu".

The Palestinian official clarified: "Successive US administrations considered settlements in occupied Palestinian territories to be illegal and sought a two-state solution in the wake of the peace process. However, the Trump administration is seeking something different that is closer to Netanyahu's vision of self-rule in parts of the West Bank that may be called a state".

He added: "The outcome of over 21 meetings between us and the Trump team were sufficient to clarify for us the goal of this administration, which is the same as that of Netanyahu. Thus we started to examine our options". He continued: "We cannot accept the continuation of the status quo because it means the resumption of settlements and imposing facts on the ground in which we lose new areas of our land on a daily basis to settlers and settlements".

Future Palestinian options range from a return to the UN Security Council with a draft resolution to recognize the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders, in accordance with the decision of the UN General Assembly in 2013, and a declaration of the State of Palestine under occupation.

A Palestinian official said: "Every month we will put forward an application to the Security Council to recognize the State of Palestine, even if the US administration uses the veto. The Obama administration always requested that we not return to the Security Council with a draft resolution to recognize Palestine as an independent state in order to avoid an embarrassing veto by the US administration, and we bowed to the request due to the situation then. Now it is different and we will submit a draft resolution to the Security Council once a month without hesitation".

Another official said: "One of the options we are currently considering is to declare Palestine a state under occupation administered by the PLO. In such a case, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) will be the state parliament and the PLO Executive Committee will act as its government". He said that one of the motives behind current efforts to convene the PNC and renew its membership is to qualify it to lead Palestine in the forthcoming phase following the declaration.

He also said that there is international recognition, including Israeli recognition of the PLO. Therefore, the PLO is entitled to take over the administration of the state under occupation.

In the next couple of months, the PNC is expected to hold a meeting to elect a new executive committee.

A covert conflict exists within the Fatah movement about who will represent it on the PLO Executive Committee because the Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee will be the candidate to succeed President Mahmoud Abbas. Sources in Fatah say that competition for the position is between Jibril Rajoub and Mahmoud al-Aloul.

The Fatah Central Committee ordered President Mahmoud Abbas to select the three representatives of the Fatah movement on the PLO Executive Committee and to select the next PNC Chairman. Informed sources said that President Abbas is leaning towards the appointment of Azzam al-Ahmad as the PNC Chairman and successor to Salim Za'anoun.



An al-Hal interview with a leader in the PFLP

Omar Shehada: The negotiations are exhausted and a new PNC based on proportional representation is required

Hamas is the opposing side to the Palestinian

Authority and the left also bears responsibility for failures

Amjad Samhan

Omar Shehada, a leader in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), argues that after 23 years of negotiations, everyone has concluded that political reconciliation and the Oslo project have lost momentum: the negotiations have consumed the negotiators and the entire Palestinian cause.

Shehada called for the formation of a Palestinian National Council (PNC) with new membership that encompasses all national and Islamic factions through elections based on proportional representation.

Shehada stressed that the people's defense of al-Aqsa Mosque gates clearly proved that resistance is the only solution to end the occupation.

These statements were aired in an exclusive interview conducted by al-Hal newspaper as follows:

In your opinion, is there a change in people's acceptance of the political negotiations with Israel? Are the PLO factions starting to change their policies in this regard, or is the political process inevitable for Palestinians?

There is now national consensus among the people to stop the negotiations that have led us to a situation of weakness, the abandonment of the rights of the Palestinian people, and an increase in settlements. The Palestinian Authority is living through its worst crisis and there has been no obvious achievement for the Palestinian people after 23 years of negotiations.

Did the Hamas authorities provide an alternative form of governance during their rule of the Gaza Strip?

The political crisis in the Palestinian arena has exacerbated with Hamas and its policies

facing another authority existing in the West Bank. After ten years of Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, nothing better has come out of it than that produced by the PA in the West Bank. This deepening crisis requires an end to individual factional interests in order to serve Palestinian national interests, and to cut the loop of political subordination to Arab regimes by creating independent Palestinian decisions free from Arab regional influences and the American-Israeli alliance.

How do you view the initiative by the al-Qassam Brigades who threaten to create a security and political vacuum in Gaza? Is this the best solution to end divisions and the crisis in the Gaza Strip?

We are witnessing a war of initiatives by Palestinians aiming to impose divisions among the parties. We do not see the opposing parties making it a priority to rescue the country from the rivalry posed by both authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Thus, we believe that national reconciliation agreements exist and no further initiatives are needed because these ultimately end in self-interest and partisan priorities that do not reflect the people's national interests and are exploited by the occupation to serve its goals.

Why did the Palestinian left, particularly the PFLP and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), fail to create a national alternative to the political divisions that have exhausted the Palestinian cause and people?

There is no doubt that the two fronts bear a special responsibility towards the Palestinian people and the national powers. That has emerged from the fact that many people gave the left the role of ending the worsening

national crisis by finding an alternative to both the national and religious projects that had reached a dead end. Looking at the situation of the PFLP, we see that objective circumstances limited its role, especially political, social and financial restrictions, in addition to the Arab embargo of the PFLP following the collapse of the Soviet Union and restrictions imposed by the Palestinian Authority. We have also heard recently that financial dues to the PFLP from the PLO have been halted. This is only an example of how the role and influence of the PFLP and the left in general has been obstructed. The PFLP has managed to survive thanks to contributions from its members and this strengthens its independent political position from external pressures.

How can the PLO represent the Palestinian people without Islamic factions, primarily the Hamas and Jihad movements?

The importance of the PLO lies in its national, democratic and pluralistic make up, as well as its national program represented in the right of return, self-determination, and the establishment of the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. This program enjoys national consensus that we have always sought and still seek to protect. This is the key base of what the PLO represents, described by George Habbash as "The moral home for the Palestinian wherever he is". Thus, the PLO has expressed the unity and national aspirations of the Palestinian people. When the Islamic political powers, specifically the Hamas and Jihad movements, appeared during the first uprising, we insisted on convening the PNC to incorporate a new membership based on proportional representation and to open the door for the Hamas and Jihad movements to



Omar Shehada

join the PLO. We in the PFLP reject the PNC with its old membership and also call for the council to be convened abroad, giving all factions the opportunity to participate within the PLO umbrella.

What does the victory of our people in Jerusalem signify and who should take the credit for that? The victory of our people in Jerusalem proved to all factions and to the PA that it is the people who bring about victory. Jerusalemites were the real leaders who sensed the danger behind the occupation schemes, who refused to surrender to them, and defeated the Israeli entity and its leaders. Their willpower on the streets of Jerusalem and against the occupation was the stuff of legends and proves that resistance is the only national choice for the Palestinian people.

Amjad Samhan is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University

Action against Kobar [village] in retaliation for Halamish

Mohammad Turkaman

During weeks of closure of Kobar village, west of Ramallah, and prior to the demolition of the house of Omar al-Abed who conducted a recent operation against the nearby settlement of Halamish, a visitor has to walk for more than half an hour from the village's main road to its center in order to report on events for the press. Israeli occupation forces introduced collective punishment immediately following the stabbing and killing of three settlers in Halamish settlement.

In the wake of this operation, the Israeli occupiers have turned the life of the village upside down and the army has imposed collective punishments against the population in violation of all international laws and norms. Al-Hal interviewed several Kobar residents to document these collective punishments that constitute serious violations of international law. The father of the person who executed the operation: Israel caused this

Al-Hal was able to interview the father of detainee Omar al-Abed before the arrest of the father, his wife, his brother, and a son by the Israeli army. The father held the Israeli occupation entirely

responsible for the operation executed by his son Omar due to Israeli violations of al-Aqsa Mosque by closing the holy sites to worshippers, installing electronic gates, and attacking Friday worshippers with horses and the spraying of sewage water. He added that his son carried out the operation for al-Aqsa and was not linked to any faction or organization.

Al-Abed continued: "My house, my children and myself are all a sacrifice for Jerusalem because al-Aqsa is a symbol of our honor. Everything we have is for Jerusalem". He stated that an Israeli intelligence services officer told him that he would give Kobar an experience of unforgettable hell and would come to al-Abed's home every night to make him relive the horror along with all the people of the village.

Municipal council member of Kobar Izzat Bedwan said: "The villagers were able to thwart the siege from the beginning. It is a challenge between us and the occupation; when they close the main village entrance, the young people go and open the road after half an hour". Bedwan added: "People were united hand in hand against the measures imposed by the Israeli occupation. The spontaneous eruption

of clashes with the occupiers is proof of the population's resilience and resolve. The closure lasted for over one month. The municipality could not repair any damage because of the repeated incursions by the occupation forces on an almost daily basis in the collective punishment against the people of Kobar".

Dr. Barghouti: the population did not surrender Media professor at Birzeit University, Dr. Wedad Barghouti, is from the besieged village of Kobar. She commented: "The blockade did not affect daily life in the village significantly because it was broken from the start; the occupation forces blocked all the entrances to the village, including dirt roads, but young people would open the entrances within an hour of the occupation forces leaving the location".

Barghouti continued: "Villagers did not surrender to the situation but resisted the occupiers to get them out of their village and reopen the roads blocked by Israeli forces. Their actions demonstrate that detainee Omar al-Abed is an example of pride for the village of Kobar and the neighboring villages".

Journalist Ahmad Samieh from Kobar said: "Occupation forces raided the village



Omar al-Abed

immediately after the operation took place in Halamish settlement and closed the entrance with soil barricades from the side of Abu Shkheidem village, and with a permanent checkpoint on the side by Burham village to make a tight closure".

Samieh continued: "Every time the occupation forces raided the village, they were confronted with fierce resistance by young people throwing stones and Molotov bombs. After the first week, the pace of the raids slowed and concentrated on specific targets such as confiscating the car of ex-detainee Omar Barghouti on the pretext that it was financed by Hamas".

Pictures: Detainee Omar al-Abed and a road blocked with soil by the occupation forces.

Mohammad Turkman is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

An al-Hal interview with a member of the PLO Executive Committee

Saleh Ra'fat: The Hamas administrative committee and the convention of the PLC undermined reconciliation

Qamar Sharif

PLO Executive Committee member Saleh Ra'fat said that the decision by Hamas to continue to manage the Gaza Strip alone through its administrative committee, plus the holding of a session by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) last July, undermined the possibility of reconciliation and closed the door on many initiatives that could have brought reconciliation closer.

On the eve of the arrival of the US delegation to Cairo and the region to start political meetings, Ra'fat believes that the Americans are biased. He stressed that Palestinians should reject unilateral sponsorship of the negotiations by Washington and must call upon other parties from the international community to oversee the political efforts. The following is the text of an interview conducted by al-Hal with Saleh Ra'fat in his office in Ramallah:

What are the demands of the Palestinian leadership to return to negotiations?

It is not possible to return to negotiations as long as Israel continues to build settlements, strangle Jerusalem, confiscate Palestinian land, arrest people, demolish houses, and besiege the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian position is clear in rejecting negotiations as long as these Israeli practices continue.

We will not return to the negotiating table unless Israel completely stops its activities, especially building settlements in the West Bank, and declares its commitment to the two-state solution as on the 4th of June 1967, enabling the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Integrity of the American mediator

In light of the peace settlement process, how impartial is the American mediator?

American policy is totally biased towards Israel, particularly the new American administration led by Trump. There have been 19 meetings between the Palestinians and Americans and an American delegation is expected to start its

mission by the end of August. However, US policy remains the same and Israel has not been asked to freeze settlements as stated in Security Council Resolution 2334. The US administration continues to reject the two-state solution or to acknowledge East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank. As a result, we will not return to negotiations under the unilateral sponsorship of the United States and call for collective international sponsorship by all permanent members of the Security Council, in addition to a number of countries in the region.

Which parties disrupt reconciliation?

There has been more than one call for reconciliation. The latest was that of the President in his first meeting regarding the events in Jerusalem. Hamas has also called for reconciliation. However, we see that reconciliation has stalled. Who, in your opinion, is causing the rupture?

Hamas formed an administrative committee for the Gaza Strip despite the fact that the composition of the committee is part of the responsibility of the national reconciliation government, which is also responsible for security and administrative duties. Hamas legitimized its administrative committee by holding a session of the Legislative Council in the Gaza Strip, thereby exacerbating divisions. We believe that reconciliation can only be achieved if the administrative committee is dissolved and all decisions made by the committee in the Gaza Strip are invalidated. This would open the way for the national reconciliation government to take over its civil and security responsibilities in the Gaza Strip. Subsequently, there could be consultations on the composition of a new government in which all political parties participate, or a national unity government with agreement on a date for presidential and legislative elections, plus elections to the Palestinian National Council (PNC) to overcome the divisions that Israel seeks to promote. Divisions have weakened our position to achieve

international recognition of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The issue posed by the international community consistently is about the territories on which the Palestinian state will be established. Therefore, the divisions must end and national unity must be sought.

A state in the Gaza Strip

What is the PLO position on Israeli calls, along with a number of countries, for the establishment of a separate state in the Gaza Strip?

What Israel wants is to establish a Palestinian state limited to the Gaza Strip and to annex the West Bank. The Palestinian position is clear on the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Netanyahu's statements are clear about isolating the Gaza Strip as a state independent from the West Bank.

Israel rejects the two-state solution; it also rejects the one-state solution due to fears of a dominant demographic bias in favor of Palestinians. It seeks the establishment of closed cantons in West Bank communities and calls for an independent state in the Gaza Strip that is isolated from the Palestinian political project.

The disadvantages of the Arab Spring

Is it acceptable, in your opinion, to wait for the Arab Spring to bring a solution to the Palestinian cause or is it possible to work now towards ideas that may end the Arab-Israeli conflict?

The Palestinian cause is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and there can be no settlement of the conflict without resolving the Palestinian issue. The Arab Spring had a detrimental impact on the Palestinian people. It brought us destruction and we lost ground, as manifested by the achievement of Israeli plans to destroy Iraq, Syria, Libya and Egypt, countries that supported the Palestinian cause. The Arab world had always supported the Palestinians. Thus, a Palestinian state must be achieved first before



Saleh Ra'fat

normalization with the occupying state of Israel can be sought.

The PNC

Are there serious calls to convene the PNC? Will all factions including Hamas and Jihad participate?

All Palestinian factions held a meeting last January in Beirut with the participation of the Hamas and Jihad movements to agree on a date to convene the PNC. There should be a follow-up to this meeting that emphasizes the need to convene the PNC next month because we believe that this will promote the end of divisions and will pave the way for presidential and legislative elections all over the country. The convening of the PNC also plays a role in determining political strategy for the next phase in a PLO that includes all Palestinian factions. It will also enable the renewal of PLO bodies through the election of a new Central Council and Executive Committee.

Qamar Sharif is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

Digital Diplomacy...The state needs more tweets

Azhar Oweida

'Digital diplomacy' or 'the media of digital diplomacy' is a new term for diplomatic media production through the news sites of foreign ministries around the world, the websites of embassies and representative offices, and on social media channels via Facebook and Twitter by these diplomatic institutions.

World foreign ministries, embassies, representative offices, and governments race to engage in this new media. An annual global report on digital diplomacy unfortunately shows Palestine in the lowest ranks, along with the Arab world, while Western countries are at the top in the use of communication platforms and electronic media.

Will this new channel of media and diplomacy lead politicians to declare the end of traditional diplomacy behind closed doors using conventional methods? Will digital diplomacy replace traditional diplomacy one day soon in relationships among nations, in resolving conflicts and disputes, and in the signing of conventions? Has Palestine joined this arena? And how can we benefit from this new media specialization?

Al-Hal met a number of experts to discuss this topic as follows:

Dr. Abdel Aal: Israel ranks eighth globally

Media professor at the Islamic University in Gaza, Dr. Wael Abdel Aal, said: "In the digital diplomacy report for 2016, Israel ranked eighth in the use of digital diplomacy globally". He stressed that Palestine and Arab countries still linger in the bottom ranks in this annual report,

which encourages the use of this new media resource that is critical for the diplomacy of any country, and for the Palestinian cause in particular".

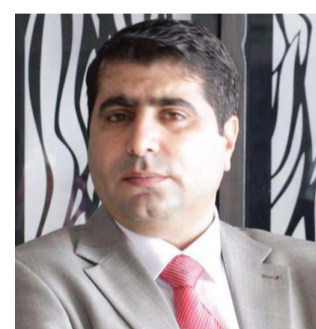
The best way for Palestinians to enter this arena according to Abdel Aal is: "Confrontation through words, argument and logic. Therefore, we need to better employ technological means and the digital world to communicate the Palestinian cause to others. If we surveyed all social media networks, we will not locate a single Palestinian website in Hebrew that targets the Jewish people to convince them of the justice of our cause as the Israelis do".

Abdel Aal added: "It is not possible for digital diplomacy to replace the traditional diplomacy conducted by states and at official levels. Digital diplomacy is conducted between officials and the public in what is mostly a virtual world. In other words it is a channel with the public through digital diplomacy".

Dr. Awad: The COGAT website (al-Munasek) poses no harm

Birzeit University lecturer Dr. Samir Awad highlighted that "Zionist pages such as COGAT pose no serious harm to the Palestinian people and cause".

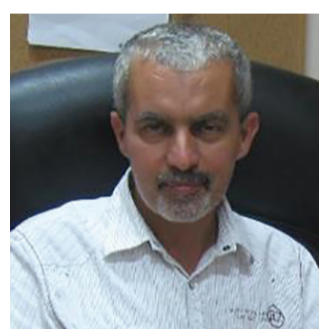
He added: "I do not find anyone who is satisfied with the news obtained from Israeli sources since local sources are developing and can make greater impact on the Palestinian public". He continued: "Palestinian digital diplomacy is more or less traditional. Trends in public diplomacy are more in line with Palestinian interests. These trends exist all over the globe



Wael Abdel Aal



Ammar Jamhour



Samir Awad

and not only in Palestine".

Jamhour: The evolution of diplomacy

In agreement with this, journalist Ammar Jamhour said: "The introduction of digital diplomacy does not necessarily mean the end of traditional or public diplomacy. What happens is an evolution in diplomatic management and methods. The use of social communication platforms and other digital channels have contributed to the emergence of the concept of digital diplomacy. This has improved diplomatic work overall where it serves as a source of information and a platform for the exchange of both knowledge and information through digital media technologies, specifically social networking platforms".

Jamhour confirmed: "Digital diplomacy is not a replacement but a new resource in the hands of a diplomat; traditional diplomacy has its tools and digital diplomacy has other tools. Diplomats have to cope with developments and learn these channels and their uses, mobilizing financial

and administrative capacities to engage in it and benefit from its audiences and messages". Jamhour added: "Most official American or European policies, especially of the Germans and French, were transmitted primarily through tweets by officials and diplomats on Facebook and Twitter. Digital diplomacy played a major role in identifying the views and trends of international players on international issues". Jamhour continued: "Digital diplomacy by Palestinians and Arabs is minimal in practice and almost non-existent in comparison to the political campaigns of Obama and Hillary Clinton". Opinions differ on the importance, production and consequences of digital diplomacy on the world, on Palestine in particular, given that traditional and digital diplomacy are complementary. Are we witnessing serious Palestinian engagement in this field?

Azhar Oweida is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

Expert opinion: The cyber crimes law violates the Basic Law and undermines freedoms

Areen Barakat

The adoption of the decree for Law No. 16 of 2017 on cyber crimes prompted an outcry condemning the law and calling for its suspension. In particular, journalists and jurists believe that the law violates the provisions of the Constitution, principles of public freedoms, and universal human rights conventions that guarantee freedom of opinion and expression.

The declaration of the new decree-law was accompanied by a campaign initiated by journalists and activists on social networking websites using hashtags and posting warnings about the dangers of enforcing this law.

At the introduction of this decree-law at the beginning of July, seven journalists were arrested in the West Bank; two of them were imprisoned under the new decree-law.

While this report was being written, a committee of specialists from NGOs drafted amendments to the decree-law in a last-ditch attempt to convince the President to approve the amendments.

To learn about the cyber crimes law, its impact, and provisions that limit freedom of opinion and expression or pose restrictions on the press, al-Hal interviewed a number of media experts who expressed the following views:

Al-Asfar: Participation rather than behind closed doors

The coordinator for legal development in the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University, Emad al-Asfar, said that the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and media outlets and journalists has become very tense. This tension increased after the adoption of the decree-law on cyber crimes. He believes that the solution is to obtain prior approval of laws on the freedom of the press from the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS) and media institutions in a participatory manner



Majed Arouri



Nabhan Khreisha



Ammar Jamous



Omar Nazzal



Emad al-Asfar

rather than drafting laws in isolation.

Al-Asfar added that the Palestinian media has called for legislation to regulate the media as this is lacking in the Palestinian community, but amendments to the decree-law on cyber crime are not sufficient. The optimal solution is to adopt the law drafted for the Higher Media Council by a large number of media, human rights and academic institutions, together with the PJS and presented to the Cabinet.

Nazzal: Violations of freedoms

Member of the PJS secretariat Omar Nazzal confirmed that the decree-law constitutes a clear violation of fundamental freedoms in Palestine. Its provisions are open to many interpretations. For example, how can 'public manners' be defined and who is responsible for determining what it means? The same with 'national security'? These are examples of broad terms, according to Nazzal, that may be interpreted at any time as violations by journalists, who may then be prosecuted and arrested on the basis of these provisions.

Nazzal believes that the decree-law will be used as a tool to suppress political dissent against the political, administrative and social

policies of the Palestinian Authority. He sees the space available for the press shrinking further with the adoption of the new decree-law, as proved in the arrest of journalists.

Jamous: Violation of the Basic Law

A legal expert at the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Ammar Jamous, believes that this law violates the provisions of the enacted Basic Law which provide for freedom of expression for journalists and the general public. He stressed that the broad terminology used in the law may be subject to interpretation by the Palestinian Authority and makes it difficult for a Palestinian to know what is forbidden and what is allowed. Thus, someone may be arrested without being aware that they have committed an offence or violated the law because the law's provisions may have multiple interpretations. Jamous added that the law breaches the principles of civil freedom and violates the privacy of individuals and freedom of expression. He rejected several arguments that rely heavily on the legal system to deal with any negative consequences of the law.

Khreisha: Arab legislation is not a model

A member of the PJS secretariat, Nabhan Khreisha, does not see any problem in

having a law on cyber crimes to pursue cases of exploitation and extortion, but the new law significantly violates freedoms. He explained that this law is inconsistent with the Basic Law amended in 2003 and is incompatible with international conventions signed by the Palestinian Authority with respect to human rights and freedom of expression. Moreover, many provisions of the new law have been copied from the laws of other Arab countries and are not good models in terms of freedoms, argues Khreisha.

Arouri: Mixing different crimes

Majed Arouri, a journalist and jurist, said: "The cyber crimes law will reflect negatively on public freedoms, especially freedom of opinion and expression. It will permit the prosecution of anyone who expresses an opinion by accusing them of a broad offence that could apply to any person. This was evident in the serious charges brought against journalists who were arrested recently and then rapidly released".

Arouri added: "The new decree-law mixes cyber crimes with other crimes to a large extent. This is a setback that undermines the Palestinian legal system, especially penal law".

Shbeir... First place in a National Geographic contest

Hamza Radwan

Fatima al-Zahra' Shbeir (aged 20) took first place with a documentary photo in a National Geographic contest, beating 19 thousand participants to engrave her name on the list of professional photographers in the Gaza Strip.

Shbeir described her first steps to success to al-Hal: "My passion for photography started only three years ago by looking at documentary pictures and films but without any practice. During the past year when equipment was made available, I started to apply what I had learned in previous years".

Shbeir added that the greatest difficulties she faced were those of challenging herself to pursue her goal and the efforts required to teach herself through practice, failing more than once in her attempts. Her ambition was more powerful and only made these difficulties an incentive to achieve success and make her dreams come true.

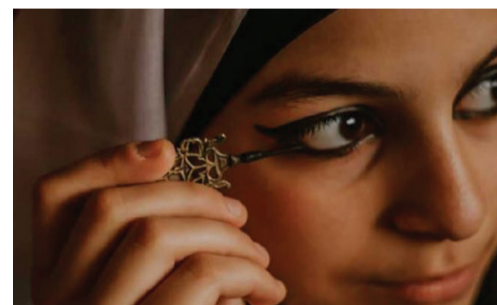
Shbeir explained that she behaves with the camera in a special way as it has allowed her to express her inner emotions

and candid feelings through this passion for photography. She explains that the intensity of the feelings she experiences when taking a camera shot are conveyed to others. She has become passionate about all the sights in the world: streets, ancient sites, cities and their inhabitants, seeing a portrait everywhere.

Shbeir said that her family has been a great support in her career. Her mother is Shbeir's key supporter and has persistently given encouragement and provided the equipment needed to pursue photography.

Shbeir won the prize in the National Geographic contest held every year with a specific title. This year's title was 'Moments of joy' and had three categories: juniors, the people's choice, and the documentary moment.

Shbeir said that she fulfilled her dream four years ago when she photographed a Palestinian henna night for this contest because it reflected her cause and heritage. Shbeir waited for the right moment to express her dream in her own way and this was what she achieved in



Shbeir's pictures won the category of 'documentary moment'.

the National Geographic contest this year.

She said: "The photo shoot took me a whole day of stress and worry because I wanted to communicate the idea in the right way. Although my participation in the contest was a bit late and only five days before the deadline, I was able to overcome the difficulties and achieve my goal successfully".

Her pictures show the moments of joy and celebration for the bride, starting from preparations for the wedding, making

the henna with decorations and candles as a Palestinian tradition, and finally the moments of celebration punctuated by dancing and singing: these pictures won her the category of 'documentary moment'.

Mohammad al-Baba, a photographer with the French Press Agency (AFP), said that photographer Shbeir's pictures were highly professional. She mastered the use of light, colors and shade, thereby incorporating more than one element of art in her photos to show to the world.