

Editorial

Spring is Coming!

Then we will laugh and our special sun will rise. Our sun is a young woman who only ripens with our seasons and whose cheeks only become rosy during our ritual ceremonies; then she becomes a young woman and not a cause. She is the most beautiful and most powerful. We are grateful to the Almighty for this woman's great determination and zeal. She never tires or gets bored of sustaining our lives, not on her famous loom in the village of al-Samou', but on a much larger loom whose foundations extend deep into the land and whose pillars reach the skies. This is the loom used by the young woman to weave and craft bespoke life worthy of us in four colors: The white for the good in us, black for the evil in those who we will defeat, red for the nascent love that is always ready to give way to pleasure, and green for the everlasting spring.

We wait for her spring and her victories. We wait for that young woman who is more than a cause. She is us and we are here, our place is ours and only ours.

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3 PAGES

Are Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan backing Trump in imposing a political solution on Palestinians?

✉ **Mohammad Yunis**

At the present time Palestinians are strongly rejecting any political process sponsored by the United States. Yet it seems that this opposition is insufficient to close the door to the [US] President's political team; carefully checked information confirms that an American-Israeli-Arab alliance is being created to impose a comprehensive regional settlement in which the issue of Palestine will be merely a minor consideration.

Palestinian officials say that the Trump administration is seeking to form a pressure group of Arab states to impose the American settlement plan; this is a matter of great concern.

More than one official stated that the Trump administration has prepared its plan in cooperation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The plan would be implemented through an Arab group including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan to put pressure on the Palestinians.

One official stated that Jordan backed Palestinian rejection of Trump's decision on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. However, Jordan faces tremendous financial and political pressure to support the US and the group of Arab states being brought together [for this purpose].

Palestinian officials do not conceal their concern about coming under pressure from the three Arab countries. One of them said: "While it is easy to oppose American and Israeli policy, the greatest worry comes from Arab countries standing with the aims of the American administration."

He added: "The map of the Arab world has changed. The new generation of leaders are less committed to the Palestinian cause and more focused on their interests and those of their regimes. Arab regimes are weak and shaky, and the American administration is bargaining to support their survival in return for engagement in a regional political process."

Saudi Arabia is a great source of financial support to the Palestinian Authority with assistance of \$20 million per month. Iranian policy poses a great threat to Saudi Arabia, which views the United States as the only power capable of supporting the kingdom in face of this danger.

The Egyptian regime faces threats to its existence due to deteriorations in the economy and security that make it more dependent on the American administration and Israel.

Jordan also faces considerable financial pressure from its major donors: the United States and Saudi Arabia. The weight of this financial factor is increasing in the growing economic crisis in the country.

Jordan's influence on Palestinians goes beyond the geographical element in which the country represents the only outlet to the outside world for West Bank residents, and extends to some social strata and centers of power in the West Bank.

Egypt also has a political influence on Palestinians thanks to its significant influence on Arab politics.

Palestinian officials express concern about the success of the Trump administration in mobilizing these three Arab countries to put pressure on the Palestinian Authority.

A Palestinian official said: "The United States is preparing for a political tsunami to wash us away and eradicate our cause. Therefore, it is mobilizing Arab countries that have great influence on Palestinians such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan."

He added: "These countries have means of imposing pressure and in the event of their alignment with the Trump administration, the PA will face serious political and financial isolation. Certainly, President Mahmoud Abbas will not give up and back down, but the situation will definitely be extremely difficult for the Palestinians."

Palestinians are deeply concerned about the American plan, especially after President Trump's declaration of what he termed "taking Jerusalem off the negotiating table".

Sources close to President Mahmoud Abbas say that the details of the American plan are now coming to light. A senior official said: "The plan envisions the establishment



"Jerusalem After The Rain" .. A poster by Palestinian visual artist Ibrahim Khuzaima

of a Palestinian state on half of the West Bank, or a little bit more, and dropping the issues of Jerusalem, refugees, and borders from the political settlement."

Western diplomats state that the Trump administration intends to impose a political solution on the Palestinians without negotiations or compromises. A European diplomat said: "We have information that the Trump administration does not intend to hold any negotiations. It is devising a plan alongside several Arab countries to pressure Palestinians to deal with the American administration."

Palestinian officials say that there have been different responses from a number of Arab countries to the American plan, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt. A senior official said: "Jordan backed us following Trump's declaration of

Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but it is facing political and financial pressure to engage in the plan."

Observers and experts say that the American administration may resort to putting significant pressure on Palestinians such as seeking a new leadership and imposing an external solution.

Professor of political science at Birzeit University, Ali Jerbawi, said: "This American administration differs from previous ones as it presumes that a settlement does not come from Ramallah to the Arab world but the other way round. From the current American perspective, Palestinians are no longer the heart and center of the regional solution but a mere part of it, and whether they are present or absent from it is the same for this administration."

How to support the cause of child prisoners?

Abdul Qader Aqel

The issue of child prisoners is a key concern within the larger issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Children under the age of 18 made up 350 of 6500 detainees in custody at the end of 2017. They are abducted under tragic circumstances by an Israeli occupation that flouts all international laws, conventions, human and moral values, and regardless of the fact that they are minors. What can be done at official, popular, and social levels for the hundreds of children who are imprisoned?

Adnan Hamarsha (17 years) is a typical example of the suffering of child detainees. His sister Laila, a journalist, said: "My brother Anas fell ill in mid-January and was transferred by Majedo prison authorities to Ramleh hospital for three days; he was unable to stand on one of his legs. He was returned to jail after a simple x-ray and without his case being treated appropriately."

The Israeli occupation arrested Hamarsha in October last year after breaking into his family house in Yaabad town, south of Jenin, although the boy has Perthes syndrome which is a rare disease.

Describing the disease, Laila Hamarsha said: "My brother has a rare disease known as Perthes syndrome in which the upper part of the leg erodes and makes the infected leg shorter than the other. It has an impact on many aspects of daily life as the individual cannot engage in robust activities or sports." If someone with this disease receives a blow or injury to the infected leg, healing is difficult and things may not return to how they had been before.

Another example of suffering

Five children from Hares village represent examples of the sufferings of child prisoners in Israeli jails: Mohammad Suleiman, Mohammad Kuleib, Tamer and Ammar Souf, and Ali Shamlawi were imprisoned before they legally became adults. Today, everyone who heard of their story five years ago is surprised to see them transformed into men.

Mahdi Suleiman, Mohammad's father said: "In mid-March 2013, Israeli occupation forces arrested my son and his friends from their homes in Hares in Salfit governorate.



The court charged them with causing the injury of a female settler who had a car accident close to their village. They claimed that the reason for the accident was children throwing stones at the settler's car. Later, the court extended their detention several times without issuing a definitive rule against the children. Thus, the Israeli occupation kept extending the detention repeatedly without trial until they reached 18, the legal age of adulthood according to the United Nations definition. This is bizarre and hypocritical because the occupation never observes international conventions on child detention and now wants to adhere to the legal age to stand trial. The Israeli occupation tailors the law to its wishes and is always above any law."

The Israeli court issued a sentence of 15 years of imprisonment on the five children from Hares village in late November following three years of administrative detention and when they had become 18.

Support mechanisms

Suleiman believes there is little media support for children detained in Israeli jails in comparison with the Israeli media. This was observed in the handling by the Israeli media of the soldier, Shalit, who

was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip and the whole world buzzed with his story. Suleiman pointed out that Palestinian embassies were failing their responsibilities to publicize the cause of child prisoners internationally. He called for greater solidarity with prisoners, particularly children, and to raise public awareness by explaining the repercussions of child imprisonment and the damage caused by the arrest of children.

The Head of the Unit for Studies and Documentation at the Commission for Detainees and ex-Detainees Affairs, Abdul Naser Farawneh, stressed that there is a lot to say about the suffering of detained children because the brutality of the occupation forces is unlimited and takes various forms. Each child has a tale of anguish in Israeli jails. Some fell ill and most of them were exposed to various kinds of torture, the impact of which cannot be described.

Farawneh continued: "Average fines rose during 2017; fines imposed on children in Ofer prison alone totaled NIS 800 thousand according to lawyers at the Commission of Detainees and ex-Detainees Affairs. What about the total

with the fines at other prisons?"

Farawneh described what can be done on an official, popular and international level: "Everyone must realize clearly that not only are detained children targets, but Palestinian childhood as a whole is targeted in the present and the future. We must create strategies that correspond to the magnitude of the threat."

Farawneh believes that support for detained children needs concerted efforts by all parties on both a comprehensive and complementary basis. Work on this issue must take four directions: First, to highlight the gravity of child detention, that it violates international law, and to expose Israeli crimes against children and the danger posed to the children's future. Second, to raise awareness among children and parents about what a child may face in the case of detention and how to avoid its repercussions. Third, to highlight what children are subjected to after arrest including torture, confiscation of rights, and trials etc. Fourth, to help children after their release from jail, ensure their inclusion, and reverse the negative physical and psychological effects of imprisonment and torture.

Trump attacked UNRWA and the response was "Dignity is priceless"

Basil Rizqallah*

The United States announced a reduction in its support to the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency* for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) by halting a payment of US \$60 million from its total contribution of \$350 million. These cuts follow the declaration by American President Donald Trump to cut off financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless it returns to the negotiating table.

UNRWA responded by announcing a fundraising campaign called "Dignity is priceless" to maintain its work. The freezing of US assistance to the Agency has been caused by deterioration in the relationship between Washington and the PA.

Al-Hal interviewed stakeholders to examine the impact of reducing support to UNRWA and the potential future of the Agency.

Abu Sunbul: Things will get worse

A spokesman for the popular committees in refugee camps, Emad Abu Sunbul, said that Palestinian refugees in camps are living in dire conditions. UNRWA is currently working in the areas of health, education and sanitation. In the past UNRWA met all the needs of refugees, but its services have been reduced to these three key services, and these are not provided fully. He pointed out that the situation had been bad even before the Trump decision and that after the decision to reduce aid, "there will be a real problem in refugee camps

and we have repeatedly warned of this."

Abu Sunbul added: "We fear that what will be left of UNRWA is a building and a flag given that the Agency will not be able to provide any services to Palestinian refugees." He called upon the PLO to shoulder its responsibilities towards refugees.

He pointed out that the reduction in American aid is part of an American-Israeli plan aimed to secure the disbanding of the Agency.

He noted that in the event that services provided by UNRWA are reduced, the popular committees will declare a strike in the refugee camps.

Agha: Blackmailing Palestinians

The Head of the PLO's Refugee Affairs Department, Zakaria Agha, said that the PLO rejects the American decision to reduce aid to UNRWA as blackmail of the Palestinian people. He described it as a political decision because UNRWA is not a Palestinian institution to be punished by the United States, and the decision is an extension of US support to Israel as part of the so-called 'deal of the century'.

He added that the decision is intended to end the work of UNRWA because the Israelis do not want UNRWA to remain as a living testimony of the suffering of Palestinian refugees. Thus, the American decision is heading in this direction. Agha blamed the American administration

for reducing aid to UNRWA as it will result in tension and disaster in the region. He described UNRWA as a stabilizing factor and when UNRWA's work falters, it leaves the entire region threatened by tension and instability. This decision is also a punishment for over five million Palestinian refugees.

Agha said: "We held a meeting in the Jordanian capital, Amman, a few days ago attended by 20 UNRWA donor countries and countries hosting Palestinian refugees. They unanimously agreed on the need to continue the work of UNRWA."

The United States provides about 40% of the UNRWA budget so a sudden cut in this contribution will prompt the collapse of the Agency and will put pressure to accept any solution to end the refugee issue; this is the essence of the American decision.

Mushashaa: UNRWA is staying

UNRWA spokesman Sami Mushashaa described the American decision to cut the level of annual aid as an unfortunate and unexpected one that has shocked refugees. The UNRWA deficit of \$49 million from the previous year was carried over to this year's budget. The American cutback has left UNRWA facing its worst financial situation since its inception.

Mushashaa indicated that the reduction in aid threatens services provided to more than five million Palestinian refugees distributed

in the five regions where UNRWA operates. Hence, the decision is a great challenge for the survival and development of services.

He confirmed that UNRWA took an irreversible and final decision not to close the 711 schools where half a million of students are enrolled, or the 143 clinics, lending programs, social services programs, and the emergency program. These will all be maintained in spite of the toll on the breadth and quality of services, but UNRWA will not close down.

Mushashaa added: "The door to dialogue remains open. Attempts are being made to dissuade the American administration from continuing with this decision because the US has been the largest donor to UNRWA since its establishment and has praised UNRWA's role as one of the most efficient UN organizations and an element of stability in the region. Thus, we hope that the US administration will rethink and reverse its decision because American aid to UNRWA totaled \$350 million last year. Any reduction in this amount will have a huge impact on the work of UNRWA."

He believes that the decision has a political dimension and is a punishment for the Palestinian Authority through UNRWA. He asked that the Agency not be blamed for what is happening.

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Ard and Rummana ...

Cooperatives and coffee shops for students in Ramallah and Birzeit



Rummana coffee shop



Ard coffee shop

Mais Abu Ghosh

A group of Palestinian activists has launched an innovative idea in the daily life of young Palestinian to establish small cooperative coffee shops and restaurants where financial and other tasks are distributed among the members of the group. These cooperatives do not aim to make large financial profits but merely a minimal income that can help needy students or cover cultural and educational activities organized by the cooperatives.

The notion of 'cooperative aid' has been known in Palestinian social heritage for centuries. Thus, the cooperatives established by today's entrepreneurs follow this concept of volunteering, but also accumulate a little capital to pay the fees of needy students or to assist others with their university expenses.

In this report, al-Hal highlights two cooperative coffee shops: one in Ramallah and the other in Birzeit that have proved successful models of a student café that can contribute to the economic concept of assistance, protection and positive added value to those living in difficult conditions.

Old Ramallah, between the small and traditional village houses, is the location of the newly established Rummana café (Pomegranate). A group of young people rented an old house and renovated it to become a cooperative café.

A member of the group and a media graduate from Birzeit University, Diaa al-Horoub, said: "We rented an old house two and a half years ago and made the necessary renovations to create a kitchen, a library, and a space for studying where doctors, engineers and industrialists can contribute to our cooperative."

Al-Horoub added: "We wanted to break the standard pattern of individual consumption and production and provide job opportunities for us as graduates and university students instead of exploitation by employers. From time to time Rummana employs people who believe in this concept." In a

similar concept to the Rummana café, the Ard (land) coffee shop was launched in the old neighborhood in Birzeit.

Ibrahim Khalil, a partner in the Ard cooperative, described the launch of the café: "We came up with the idea of creating a café in Birzeit to provide space for students. Preparations of the location took us several months and we launched the café last October."

Al-Horoub explained how they manage the cooperative: "Partners pay contributions to get the project rolling, and then money is distributed to meet the needs of partners and employees. In addition to financial contributions, partners of the cooperative assume working and cleaning responsibilities at the café on weekly basis."

Al-Horoub added: "We distribute tasks to partners and employees at the café to enable each of them to do other things such as studying or learning a practical skill. This allows university students who are partners in the cooperative to balance work and study. There is a timetable for each member that distributes the work fairly and efficiently."

Beyond the idea of student economic empowerment, Rummana welcomes everyone and works to promote social, educational and supportive relationships among the cooperative's partners, who are quite numerous today. Al-Horoub pointed out that on top of the benefits in social values, some financial profits are accumulated in a fund for needy students.

Ibrahim Khalil added: "We divide up work at Ard café to manage and develop the café as well as to improve collective production. Even when a person cannot be a member of the cooperative, they may still play a part in it. For example, we have two students from Birzeit and Al-Quds Universities who work at the café as employees although they do not contribute to the cooperative."

Birzeit University student Adham Karajeh said: "There is no fixed pattern of work at Ard café. This makes it comfortable and fun, and enables me to study in spite of my work at the café."

Traditional Palestinian dishes form the majority of the menu at Rummana and Ard coffee shops. Al-Horoub explains: "We put a traditional Palestinian breakfast on our menu and our clients are usually seated on one table to promote greater communication and partnership. We allocated special days of the week for traditional Palestinian dinners such as Maqloubeh, which is served on Mondays and Wednesdays."

"Prices at the coffee shop are below market prices. There is a minimal profit margin to ensure sustainability and we do not seek big profits."

According to Ibrahim Khalil, "The menu in Ard coffee shop targets university students. It offers special prices that take their financial circumstances into consideration."

Rummana and Ard coffee shops provide an appropriate atmosphere for students to study. Those in charge of both coffee shops sometimes organize educational seminars and lectures in cooperation with youth groups.

Al-Horoub added: "Rummana hosts a library and has a film program, plus musical and high-quality art evenings. There are traditional games such as backgammon. On the second floor, we set up a hall equipped with computers to help students in their studies and research."

Alongside the food menu, Ard coffee shop offers additional printing services to meet student demand. Ibrahim Khalil said: "Printing prices at Ard coffee shop differ completely from other print shops. Students can print their lectures and research projects without worrying about the price as it is much lower than the market." Student Nassar Jaradat who works in the coffee shop cooperative confirmed this and said: "We wanted to create a favorable atmosphere for students and provide them with electronic printing facilities with prices that are very low compared with print shops in Ramallah and Birzeit."

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Victims demand compensation for contaminated vaccines given half a century ago

Samar Dreimeli

Abdul Muti Odwan (56 years) was afflicted with polio in his right leg when he was one year old after he received a contaminated polio vaccine at one of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) clinics in Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip.

Abdul Muti was not the only one afflicted on that day: a number of other children his age who received the vaccine on the same date at the same clinic were also afflicted with polio.

Odwan said: "The hardest moments were those when I stood in the morning queue at school because I was embarrassed at being lame, and about the way I walked or stood in the queue."

Abdul Muti lives in a house made of asbestos. He has four girls and three boys but can barely support or educate them as a result of his polio, which drove him out of school, and because of the lack of job opportunities for

people with physical disabilities.

Said Abu Meree (56 years of age) from Rafah refugee camp has four boys and two girls. His mother told him that he had received a contaminated vaccine when he was 9 months old at the UNRWA clinic in his neighborhood. This resulted in the paralysis and inadequate growth of his right foot.

Abu Meree stressed that being afflicted with polio at an early age had hindered his life ever since as he cannot walk for more than 100 meters, and only then with the help of crutches.

According to Odwan and Meree, there are at least 20 cases affecting both males and females in their neighborhood of Shaboura camp in Rafah.

Crying bitterly, Said's mother affirmed that what had happened to her son was the result of the vaccine given by the UNRWA. She recalls that after they returned home that day, her son had a fever. She could not sleep that night because he was crying and screaming

from the pain in his foot from the vaccination needle. The next day, her son's foot became like 'a piece of cloth', prompting her to take him back to the clinic, but to no avail.

We visited the UNRWA regional office in the Gaza Strip and their response was that the UNRWA is committed to providing health services to Palestinian refugees, with infants and children receiving vaccines for 12 contagious diseases according to regulations from the Palestinian Authority.

The Agency added: "In the case of an adverse reaction to a vaccine, the UNRWA holds an investigation, and implements corrective and supportive measures. There may or may not be a causal relationship between the occurrence of an adverse reaction after the vaccine and the use of the vaccination."

The Agency added: "There is no vaccination that protects everyone and from which no one will suffer an adverse reaction. It is not possible to anticipate adverse reactions in all individuals, although this is unlikely to

happen and occurs rarely, in which case it is thoroughly investigated."

With regard to the incidents that took place 50 years ago, the UNRWA is committed to making an appropriate settlement according to the convention on the privileges and immunities of United Nations agencies and to domestic law.

The statute of limitation in current Palestinian law is 15 years and as these claims date back 50 years, it is not possible for the UNRWA to hold a meaningful investigation to determine if this was a result of an error or otherwise and whether compensation is due.

Human rights activist Samir Zaquoot from the al Mezan Center for Human Rights affirmed that the UNRWA, as a party that provides humanitarian services to refugees all over the world including Palestinian refugees, is obliged to compensate these victims from a humanitarian perspective, albeit after decades, as ultimately they are victims who require support.