

Very simple wishes for 2017

Along with the saying "Chin up!", let us look forward to a slightly better year. What do Palestinians hope for specifically? Much dignity, some money, plenty of happiness and freedom...taking into consideration that the Gaza Strip needs a lot of electrical energy since darkness is suffocating. Jerusalem needs us so much...all of us, with all that we are and all what we have. Back to Gaza...It needs some welfare and much oxygen. We in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jenin, Hebron and Jericho are somewhat concerned by the many fatal medical errors, the poor educational system, by poverty and unemployment, and by many little issues that disrupt our lives such as road barriers, injustice...etc. But honestly, the most important thing that we lack is liberation... We want liberation and we will take care of the rest. We will hold on. We will persevere and succeed by ourselves since we learned from the past that solutions never come from outside. Wishing you all best and a Happy New Year.

Palestinians expect the worst in the Trump era

✶ Mohammad Younis

The blunt, overt and unprecedented intervention by president-elect Trump to have the draft Arab-Palestinian resolution to the UN Security Council withdrawn before he officially took office as President of the world's greatest superpower is an indication of what awaits Palestinians in the coming four years.

It is no secret that Trump intervened personally to ask the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, to withdraw the draft resolution after he learned that President Barak Obama's administration had taken the decision to pass the resolution in the Security Council and not to use its veto for the first time in decades.

When Trump's attempt failed and another four member countries presented the resolution in the Security Council, where it was approved by 14 votes and the abstention of the United States representative, Trump announced that things would be different once he arrived in the White House.

Some believe that Trump's winning of the recent American elections is a strategic victory for Israel and its head of government, Benjamin Netanyahu, since Trump announced several policies biased in favor of Israel that do not conform to traditional American policy, whether Democratic or Republican. Trump's policy in favour of Israel begins with the proposal to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and supports settlements rather than considering them as an obstacle to peace.

Aides to President Mahmoud Abbas say that they are concerned about fundamental changes that may occur in American policy in the era of President Trump. These changes range from moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem, halting condemnation of the expansion of Israeli settlements, transferring the political file from the State Department to the White House, and putting pressure on President Mahmoud Abbas to return to direct negotiations with Israel according to the conditions prescribed by Netanyahu; no such steps were ever attempted by the Obama administration in the past eight years.

Palestinian officials and State Department representatives recently reached an understanding on the joint relationship comprising of agreement that the goal of the political process is to implement the two-state solution within the 1967 borders and to condemn settlements as a threat to this solution.

Saeb Erekat, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, said that these understandings constituted an important basis for the future American-Palestinian relationship, creating an institutionalized framework for this relationship for the first time.

Successive American administrations have so far dealt with the Palestinian Authority in the context of the political process and not as an independent Palestinian state or entity.

However, members of the negotiating team are not hiding their concern about the future for these understandings after Trump arrives at the White House. One member said: "There is a possibility that Trump will transfer the political process entirely from the State Department to his office, where these understandings will become irrelevant."

The Palestinian delegation visiting Washington concluded that the arrival of Donald Trump to the White House gives Palestinians two choices: either to become engaged in the political process according to the rules devised by Trump, which are the same as those espoused by Netanyahu, or to disengage from the political process during the period of Trump's authority to avoid anticipated change from a comprehensive political process to partial deals based on the premise that Palestinian territory is not for Palestinians



but is disputed land.

A member of the delegation said: "Engaging in a political process with President Trump means entering a new maze with a very low ceiling. Therefore, I believe it is better for us to maintain our position and avoid a political process of bargaining and minor deals about living, security and economic affairs."

The American Secretary of State, John Kerry, spent the past four years trying to revive the political process to no avail. President Mahmoud Abbas said on more than one occasion that Kerry told him that he understands the Abbas position and that Netanyahu is the obstacle.

President Obama started his term in office by trying to find a solution to the conflict and to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 because he was aware that a solution to the Palestinian issue is the

key to resolving and overcoming the crisis devastating the region.

An aide of President Mahmoud Abbas said that in the first meeting between Obama and Abbas after Obama's election eight years ago, Obama said that he would freeze Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories because that would be in "America's national interests." The aide added: "I am quoting Obama saying to President Abbas: Everywhere, there is someone who attacks American forces and interests in the name of Jerusalem and I want to resolve this issue and end this conflict."

Not only did Obama's attempts to resolve the Palestinian issue collide with the intransigence of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his successive right-wing governments, but also besieged Obama in the heart of a Congress with a Republican majority.

2017: A new National Council and new central and executive committees

■ **Mohammad Younis**

After his success in convening the seventh conference of the Fatah movement, sidelining a number of opponents, and closing the door on repeated Arab interventions advocating the return of his greatest rival, Mohammad Dahlan, to the Fatah leadership, Mahmoud Abbas is preparing for a major change in the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Officials close to President Mahmoud Abbas have said that he is preparing for the convention of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in the coming months in which its membership will be reformulated and a change of leadership will take place.

A senior official told al-Hal: "In the coming few months we will have a new National Council and new central and executive committees."

He added: "The current PNA will hold a meeting to create a new Council comprising of new representatives of factions, popular unions, and independent figures."

The last regular session of the PNA was held in Algeria in 1989. An emergency session was held in the Gaza Strip in 1996 with the

aim of annulling an article in the National Charter, and another session was held to fill some empty positions in the PLO. No changes were made to the PNC membership during those sessions.

The PNC comprises 700 members. The majority are independent members appointed in the seventies and eighties, and dozens have died over the past ten years, including the vice-president of the PNC Tayseer Qubaa and a number of members of the executive committee.

The PNC President will ask the Palestinian factions and unions to nominate their representatives, while President Mahmoud Abbas will appoint independent individuals according to PNC tradition. A senior official pointed out that President Abbas intends to change the majority of PNC independent members because of their advancing age. It has been the tradition that the PNC Executive Committee approve the appointment of independent members. The official explained that the Committee will not stand in the way of the changes that the President intends to carry out.

The birth of a new PNC will establish a new Central Committee

comprising 125 members and a new executive Committee for the PLO.

Among the most prominent personalities expected to leave the PLO leadership are Farouq Qadoumi, who has been responsible for the political department since the early seventies and is now 87 years old, Zuhdi Nashashibi who is over 90 years old, Salim Zaanoun, Zakaria Agha, Ali Isaac, Ahmad Qurei, Abdel Rahim Mallouh, and Yasser Abed Rabbo.

The Fatah movement will select new representatives from the newly elected leadership as well as independent candidates to fill leadership posts in the PLO.

The most prominent figures nominated to assume leading posts in the PLO are Jibril Rajoub who held the majority of votes in the Fatah Central Committee elections after Marwan Barghouti. Dr. Mohammad Shtayeh ranked third after Barghouti and Rajoub. There is also Saeb Erekat.

President Mahmoud Abbas resorted to local elections to renew the legitimacy of Palestinian leadership institutions after general elections for PA institutions were halted as a result of the split between the Gaza Strip



under the administration of the Hamas movement and the West Bank under the administration of the PA and Fatah, and following Arab pressure to return Mohammad Dahlan to Fatah.

A number of the old guard failed in the recent Fatah elections; Ahmad Qurei, Tayeb Abdel Rahim and Nabil Shaath gave

way to younger generations like Sabri Saidam, who is 47 years old, Dalal Salameh (50 years old), and Dr. Mohammad Shtayeh (58).

An official who preferred to remain anonymous said: "The Fatah movement has new leadership which will hold key posts in the PLO."

An interview with a member of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Ismat Mansour: Left-wing groups continue to lose ground, Fatah has become a bureaucratic entity, and the PLO needs to be rebuilt

■ **Amjad Samhan**

Ismat Mansour: A member of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine said that the Palestinian left wing is losing its public support due to factionalism and egotistical attitudes, while the Fatah movement is turning into a bureaucratic entity more than a popular revolution. He pointed out that it is important for the PLO to emerge from its flaccid status with a reformulation that ensures participation by all affiliated parties and the inclusion of Islamic parties to create a renewed political program that will ensure the achievement of Palestinian principles.

Where do you think the current popular uprising is heading? Is it ongoing or breaking up? And what are its strengths?
We note a retreat in the current uprising, although there are some sporadic events and individual operations. However, we knew from the outset that the momentum of this uprising is dependent on a united political position. Unfortunately, this does not exist in the context of the current political division, combined with Palestinian Authority discouragement of this uprising, which weakens the chances of its survival. In addition, there are the huge deterrents used by Israel in its tightening of military rules and measures against Palestinian youth and demonstrators. Given all these factors, the uprising is unable to meet its desired goals or to progress and escalate to a full-scale uprising, but remained confined to individual operations.

Given the dwindling influence of the Palestinian left wing, are there any solutions to end the decline? Is unity still the answer or is electoral plurality better?

The Palestinian left wing appears to be in decline. Nevertheless, left-wing parties exist in the world and survived the crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They were capable of renewing their social and political discourse by expanding their circle of allies and hence, the circles they represented in society. They established alliances that brought them back to power and influence and we should learn from their experience. Palestinians have not yet overcome the structural crisis in an objective manner. There remains a role for the left wing and the Palestinian arena needs them. The theoretical discourse of Palestinian left-wing parties is realistic and matches the political and social interests and needs of the Palestinian people. Yet despite this, it lacks influence due to its weaknesses, which are attributed to factionalism and failure to renew its internal structure and powers in response to existing developments and new generations. If the role of the Palestinian left-wing parties is to be restored, a new united social and political framework is needed to enrich its manifesto. Without this, there will be no future for the Palestinian left wing. If changes do not occur now, the left wing will be overtaken by other forces that will attract its members. The unity of the left wing is impeded by the domination

of certain personalities who serve their own interests by introducing factional intolerance among affiliates, which will eventually lead to the extinction of the left-wing parties.

Where is the Fatah movement heading following its seventh conference?

Unfortunately, Fatah has become a bureaucratic entity affiliated to the Palestinian Authority. Fatah has been officially contained by the PA through the conference structure and the resulting manifesto, which is more of a fragile political peace manifesto incompatible with the status of Palestinians.

Following the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya during the Arab Spring, where do you think things are heading in Syria, Iraq and Yemen?

The conspiracy of the Western powers and their attempts to derail these revolutions has now become clear. These revolutions occurred as a result of the contradictions between the people and regimes that had outlived their purpose and had lost all means of developing their populations, leaving them backward and in poverty. Basically, these revolutions occurred due to a natural objective need. This revolution among the Arab people was weakened by the role played by parties and the elite, and also because it lacked effective leadership. Thus, it fell under the control of the Muslim Brotherhood in some areas such as Egypt and Tunisia, and was stolen from the people.

How it is possible to convert the PLO



from slogans to action on the ground? Through elections, a political program or other options?

The PLO is almost non-existent and is contained by the PA through the marginalization of its institutions, remaining merely as a symbol. If the PLO is to be rebuilt and revived, its programs must be reformulated to embrace all components of the Palestinian people, including the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements, on the basis of the PLO National Charter and partnership through elections and true democratic representation of all powers, who must jointly formulate a consolidated program. Anything less than this will not lead to a breakthrough for the PLO.

The Meograph ... new video technology that puts an end to 'read more' in the media

Muemen Hamed*

From time to time, information technology opens up new horizons for journalists with the emergence of popular new techniques on media platforms, especially the new media which utilizes social media as an essential partner for news dissemination. The latest in this regard is the short video or so-called 'meograph'. This type of video simplifies and abbreviates information for rapid presentation to viewers who, in turn, absorb the information without sitting for too long in front of their electronic screen.

Al-Hal newspaper features the 'meograph' in many aspects, mainly as a journalistic technique. It is also significant in its meaning and depth within a framework that blends words with images. Academics of the information age appreciate the presentation of information abbreviated in just a few seconds in a meograph. Birzeit University media professor Mohammad Abu Rub, a specialist in social media, summarized the concept that brought the short video to new media platforms by saying that an individual does not spend a long time browsing material on social networks, therefore posing a new challenge of how to simplify information and present it in a short time.

The press on the mobile phone

Hadil Wahdan, a television professor at Birzeit University, raised a related subject of the advancement of news sites and their search for their own material rather than dependency on satellite stations, YouTube and pictures taken on mobile phones. She pointed out the way that media experts globally deal with videos in the expectation of achieving a key position within the digital media in the near future. She added: "These expectations are underpinned by the dominance of videos on social networks, especially on Facebook and YouTube, where a

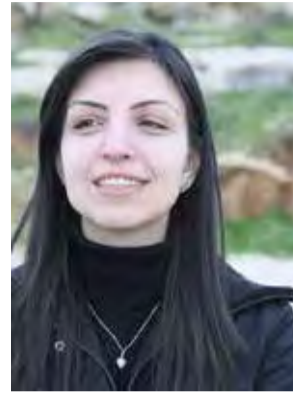
huge number of downloads and video-watching takes place."

Journalist Amjad Hussein justified the media adopting short productions, including the meograph, stating: "In today's era of speed, a viewer is not prepared to be exposed to any material for more than few minutes unless he understands the whole story. If he does not understand the point in this short period of time, the press will lose this viewer." He pointed out the importance of using a short video that captures the three senses of the viewer, i.e. image, writing and the sound of accompanying music. In other words, a modern recipient only requires press material to answer five questions without lengthy descriptions, details and narration."

This is enhanced by "social media in which all media outlets rely mainly on the publication of their press material. We all know that social media viewers want rapid input because they are exposed to a huge volume of information with each page update on any of the social media sites, driving them to watch the most interesting material, and the least time-consuming."

Since the meograph is a new development in the media field, Wahdan referred to two key points facing traditional media users: the first is their acceptance of this type of video, the second is that they see it as a form of photo-reporting or effective media message. "The response may vary from one person to another. I was a traditional media employee working in TV and satellite stations for 15 years but now look to locate myself within the new digital media."

Wahdan defended short video technology from accusations of "distorting or amputating the message." She explained: "This is not correct since there is always a reporter who produces a TV report and someone who does not know the



Hadil Wahdan



Mohammad Abu Rub



Amjad Hussein

basics. In digital media and social networking, which form the bulk of the modern media system, there is a reporter who masters the delivery of the message and one who does not." The end of the 'read more' phrase

In his reference to the features of simplifying and abbreviating a short video, Abu Rub said that this is done at the expense of meaning and depth, but "at the same time, a person browsing the site is apparently not looking for depth and will ignore the material if he encounters a 'read more' phrase. This is the result of the huge amount of publications on social media and their plurality and diversity". He continued: "The viewer looks for consumer content that does not require deep thinking and where his role is solely watching and to receive instantaneously." Through his activity in this field, journalist Amjad Hussein has experienced how media outlets became geared towards the short video while trying to develop themselves in this direction but lacking people who can master this work. He said: "There are many examples of Palestinian media outlets that started to develop themselves

in this regard but cannot find anyone who can do this job. They have to look for non-journalist amateurs who have montage and photography skills. Only a few journalists are keeping pace with these rapid developments in media production."

Academics Abu Rub and Wahdan are optimistic about the future of the meograph. Abu Rub said: "In Birzeit University, we started to teach this topic as part of electronic media. It takes more than a session or two and requires practical training, especially to focus on the idea and present it simply and concisely to be useful to the audience."

Wahdan said: "Although I started my profession in traditional media, I am convinced that the future is oriented towards rapid technological developments, smart technologies, speed, and everything relevant to this terminology. Therefore, if we want to play a role in future, we need to accept this quickly."

* Muemen Hamed is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

In an interview with al-Hal

Qasem: Hamas wants a strong Fatah...No ISIS in the Gaza Strip... The French initiative is no different from Oslo and Madrid

Estabrak Yahia *

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasem said that his movement wants a strong Fatah internally despite disagreements on many issues.

His comments came in an exclusive interview with al-Hal newspaper about the Hamas position on a number of current issues, including the informal reconciliation meetings to take place in Switzerland at the invitation of the Palestinian Center for Policy Research & Strategic Studies- MASARAT, and also the French invitation for a conference on issues related to a settlement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

The relationship with Fatah

We started the interview with local affairs because Fatah convened its seventh conference in Ramallah, in which Hamas participated with a speech by the Chairman of the political bureau, Khaled Mashaal, in the opening session. The Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, Hazem Qasem, emphasized that Hamas wants a strong and unified Fatah that will empower Palestinians internally. Hamas is concerned that any differences with Fatah will not have an impact on the image of the Palestinian

people's struggle internationally. For this reason, Hamas was present at the opening session of the conference where Khaled Mashaal spoke of the importance of reconciliation and partnership in decision making.

Qasem also stressed that Hamas remains in disagreement with Fatah on multiple aspects of its political program, especially the relationship with the Israeli occupation. According to him, Fatah insists on seeking a settlement with the Israeli occupation and the PA continues with its security coordination, which are unacceptable nationally and not just to Hamas.

Qasem believes that the Fatah political program still excludes armed struggle, and also most forms of struggle "which we cannot agree with". He added that Fatah monopolizes political decision making, makes arrests on political grounds or for resisting the occupation, and undermines reform of the PLO as stipulated in the reconciliation agreements.

Hamas relationship with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

We asked Qasem about the relationship with ISIS and what drives some to accuse Hamas of embracing members of ISIS and giving them

freedom to act in the Gaza Strip.

He described these accusations as Israeli occupation propaganda and mere lies that bear no relationship to reality. The Gaza Strip is dedicated only to national resistance and the struggle against the Israeli occupation. The position towards Egypt after the vote of the UN Security Council

A resolution condemning Israeli settlements and presented by Egypt to the UN Security Council was withdrawn later under Israel pressure, but New Zealand, Senegal, Malaysia and Venezuela filed the resolution again and it was the first of its kind to be passed since 1979. Qasem explained that Hamas is demanding that the Security Council decision be interpreted into practical measures to halt the building of settlements, in addition to the removal of all aspects of the occupation. He added that Hamas appreciates the stance adopted by the countries that supported the resolution. On the Hamas position towards Egypt after the withdrawal of the resolution, Qasem preferred not to talk about the details and only about the general policy related to the decision.

A negative view of the French initiative The French Foreign Minister, Jean-

Marc Ayrault, called for an international peace conference in the Middle East and the revival of the peace process before the end of 2016 with the participation of 70 countries. Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu will be invited to a separate meeting at the end of the conference; the latter refused to participate.

Qasem commented that past experience proved that such conferences result in nothing tangible for the Palestinian people as Israel always flouted any resolutions issued or agreements made. The Madrid conference and Oslo agreement are the best examples. He stressed that these meetings amplify internal differences because there is broad opposition to the political track adopted by the PA.

MASARAT is also holding an informal debate this month in Geneva, Switzerland, on national unity and reconciliation with the participation of a number of leaders of Palestinian factions. Qasem said that his movement sees the termination of the split as a strategic option that they are seeking to achieve seriously and carefully. In addition, Hamas has renounced its political and constitutional right to form a government in the interests of



Hazem Qasem

achieving reconciliation. He stressed that the launching of the process of reconciliation rests with President Abbas when he performs what was required from him in previous reconciliation agreements. On the Switzerland meeting, Qasem explained that Hamas confirms its readiness for any reconciliation and is committed to any efforts to end divisions and establish true national partnership in support of the Palestinian people's struggle and its blessed Intifada.

* Estabrak Yahia is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

Al-Hal asks al-Bireh municipality: Why are you late in completing your projects?

Ehab Akel

When expressing an opinion on the infrastructure projects undertaken by al-Bireh municipality, people make jokes or complain. They say: "Once a pit is filled, another one is dug", or "I make sure to leave my home an hour earlier to get to work on time but I am still late sometimes", or "In summer they are summering, and in winter they work".

Many criticisms have spread via Facebook, while praise for the municipality is barely visible amid the bustle. Very few people see the many projects as proof of efforts to improve services to meet the needs of the 80 thousand people living in the city. Al-Hal retold the jokes and complaints of the public to al-Bireh municipality and interviewed the head engineer of the projects department, Yusef al-Baba. He stated that these projects are mainly intended to serve the population by renewing infrastructure networks built dozens of years ago and requiring repair.

How many projects have been implemented during 2016?

Talking about numbers in this context is unfair to us. So, if we say that al-Bireh municipality completed three projects since the beginning of the year, we are not putting it the right way. In fact, each project has distinctive features depending on the number of beneficiaries and the number of roads that branch off the main street. For example, the work on al-Nahda Street differs from the work on al-Quds Street. Actually, the municipality has started the implementation of three projects since the beginning of 2016 in al-Nahda Street, a project to resurface 22 internal roads and al-Quds Street.

Are projects properly planned?

All projects undertaken by the municipality are properly planned and proceed according to a set timetable. We understand that people may be disturbed as a result of this work, but most ongoing projects for which al-Bireh municipality is responsible are vital ones. It is normal that people will be affected temporarily but the effect would be much worse if these



projects were not implemented: Who can live without electricity, water, a sewage system or communications? Extending these services is part of the framework of municipality rehabilitation work. For al-Quds Street, the planning started on 26 May 2015 with an exchange of correspondence with service companies informing them that the municipality and its council intended to work on the street beginning in 2016.

What are the problems of al-Quds Street?

The services network in al-Quds Street is very old and is partially worn out, requiring renovation. The street was dug up along 3 km and 13 power cables were laid. The drinking water network is also old and has leaks that result in a waste of water, while some neighborhoods suffer from water shortages. The old sewage system is being expanded to four times its size because the old system cannot accommodate the increase in population over past years in the area of Um al-Sharayet neighborhood, al-Amaari refugee camp, the downtown, al-Quds Street and Ras Hussein, which has a population of 40 thousand using the same pipelines that cross al-Quds Street. The same applies to the telecommunications

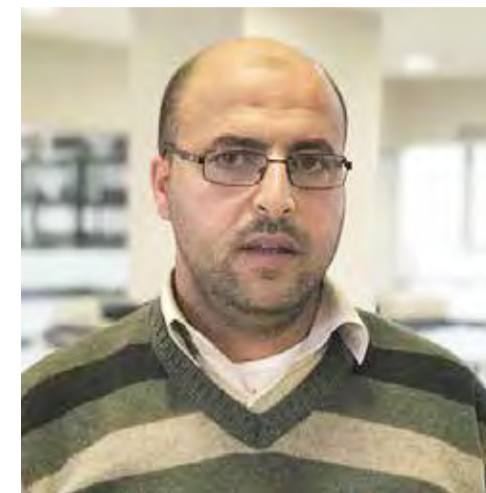
network and internet services; these are also old and need additional capacity to improve their quality. The rainwater network requires work to cope with the increase in drainage southwards towards Jerusalem. In addition, there is a plan to exchange 45% of the lighting network with energy-saving LED lights and to upgrade cables that date back to the 1960s.

Was it not taken into consideration that the al-Bireh population would increase as we are witnessing today?

It was not expected that Ramallah and al-Bireh municipalities would become the administrative capital of Palestine. Twenty years ago, who would have thought that the population of al-Bireh would double four-fold up to 80 thousand? Therefore, we must make plans to absorb the growing population and to implement matching infrastructure projects based on that.

People have the impression that projects take much more time than planned, yet we have never heard of a contractor being fined for a delay. What do think of this?

The contracts signed with contracting companies are clear and there are penalty clauses inflicted on contractors



for delays. However, we must realize that projects, no matter how small and simple, cannot be completed in a couple of days. We as a municipality face many legal obstacles. For example, work at night or during rush hours is not allowed. One more thing that the public must understand is that each service performs its own rehabilitation work independently with its own particular contractor. We as a municipality take this into consideration when bidding and we adopt the duration of time needed by that service company to accomplish its repairs. We add to this the time that we as a municipality also need to complete repairs to networks related to our duties, such as the sewage system.

Why can you not engage service companies to work as one team to reduce the time needed for the completion of a project to a minimum?

We hope that the enactment of a law supervised and drafted by the Ministry of Local Government will commit service companies to working with one contractor. Efforts are being made to make this legal in 2017 and will definitely reduce the duration of projects, but this does not mean that projects can be finished within a standard period visualized by the public.

A temporary UNRWA job creation program

Graduates from the Gaza Strip work in cleaning, farming and as school janitors... the alternative is unemployment

Amal Breika

Hundreds of university graduates are shocked and disappointed when they obtain a temporary job opportunity with the UN Relief and Works Agency-UNRWA because these opportunities do not match their specialization. They are obliged to leave the education and skills they have earned to work in cleaning, farming or as school janitors. However, the UNRWA has justifications and reasons.

Forced acceptance

After hesitating for a long time, Duaa Mustapha applied for a temporary job with the UNRWA although she knows that she may be

offered a job of school janitor despite holding a university degree in business administration. Mustapha had not found any job opportunity since she graduated five years ago. She felt that she was a burden on her family and that any opportunity that could meet her own requirements and help her family would be much better than staying at home. She believes that the UNRWA policy of employing university graduates is demeaning and is not consistent with their level of education. She believes that the potential of young people must be respected and they should be offered jobs commensurate with their university degrees.

Rejection despite demand

Sahar Serri holds two university degrees: a diploma in the food industry and a BA in agricultural engineering. She refused to work as a janitor in an UNRWA school in spite of her desperate need for work as she considered it a humiliation. Serri says: "The UNRWA are still calling and offering me the job of a janitor but my self-respect and my degrees oblige me to strongly reject the job again." She added that it is not the first time that she has been offered a job that is not suitable to her specialty. Once, the UNRWA offered her a job contract for three months. When she went

to sign, she found that the job title was that of an agricultural worker. When she refused to sign, the employee told her: "Wait another ten years to get another job opportunity!"

Serri called upon graduates to mount serious opposition against the unfair employment policy of the UNRWA as it is demeaning. Meanwhile, Palestine ranks at the top in education.

Journalist Amir Turk could only find a job as a security guard in one of the UNRWA headquarters. He also said that a female graduate in public relations had signed a contract to work as a cleaner. He demanded that the UNRWA follow a

28 years since the launch of the Right to Education Campaign

Relationships built with more than 50 European and American universities to inform them about Israeli violations of education

Basel Rizqallah

With the launch of the first Intifada, Palestinian educational institutions were subjected to closures by Israeli forces. Birzeit University was hit the hardest with 15 intermittent closures under military orders. The longest was for 51 months, depriving students from pursuing their education and prompting academics and students to establish the Right to Education Campaign, founded in 1988, to promote education as a fundamental human right and a tool to combat the occupation and achieve freedom.

Documentation, mobilization and advocacy

Campaign coordinator Sundus Hammad said that the work of the Campaign is based on monitoring and documenting the constant violations of the educational process by Israeli occupation forces. It also provides legal assistance to students and teachers arrested by Israeli forces. A database has been created and a lawyer was assigned by the University to provide free legal services to detained students, academics and employees. The Campaign also facilitates the re-enrollment of students in the University following their release. The other mission of the Campaign is to mobilize and advocate for the right of education through networking and communicating with the international academic community.

Hadi Izzat, a volunteer in the Campaign, said: "We expose to the world the suffering resulting from the obstruction of the Palestinian educational system by documenting and disseminating information on violations against education. The aim is to improve learning conditions."

Noor Daghlas, another volunteer, added: "We are demanding that Palestinians can enjoy their right to education. We raise the voices of those deprived of the right to education and work and disseminate their case locally and abroad."

Volunteer Dima Bustami said that the aim of the Campaign is to highlight violations committed against education in Palestine and to raise awareness of the difficulties facing education to mobilize global advocacy.

Contacts with European universities and tours in America

Hammad clarified that the Campaign had succeeded in establishing contacts and



Hadi Izzat



Noor Daghlas



Sundus Hammad



Dima Bustami

networking with more than 15 European universities, in addition to more than 35 universities in the United States. The Right to Education Campaign tours in the US almost every other year, supported and financed by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). One tour took place in 2014 and the next in 2016. The Campaign coordinator confirmed that the goal of visiting American universities is to build global solidarity with the issue of education under occupation through 'student-to-student' communication.

In addition to the Campaign coordinator, volunteer students from Birzeit University work in the various units of the Campaign. They are offered training to enhance their skills. There is also an advisory committee consisting of 10 academics from Birzeit University. The Campaign carries out two major activities every year: a week against apartheid where the effect of racial separation is highlighted and a week on the right to education.

Volunteers for education

Daghlas talked about the reasons behind his volunteering with the campaign: "I volunteered to reveal the difficulties to which the Palestinian people are subjected at every level and to make our voice heard by ourselves and not through a third party." He added: "The independence of the Campaign as unbiased towards any party or faction and non dependent on financing were additional motives for volunteering."

Volunteer Hadi Izzat believes that education is important for the development of the community and to make a decent living. The Israeli occupation is obstructing this process

and thus, the Campaign defends the right to education and addresses the difficulties faced.

The Israeli occupation makes education 'regional'

Hammad said that Israeli violations persist even when they are not apparent. The Separation Wall is making education 'regional' by confining the mobility of people. Thus, 60% of Birzeit University are currently residents of Ramallah and the surrounding villages, while Palestinian students from 1948 territories make up no more than 2% and there are barely 10 students from the Gaza Strip.

Hammad indicated that the Israeli occupation deprives more than 60 students from pursuing their education due to detention. Over the past five years, 600 students from Birzeit University were arrested. Eight students who headed the Student Council have also been arrested since 2004.

She explained that the University is unable to attract academics from abroad because Israel often refuses to give them an entry visa. In the event of obtaining a visa, it is usually a tourist visa that does not give the right to work. There are 25 academics and employees in Birzeit University who suffer from this problem.

The right to education week

This is an annual event hosted by the Campaign during November to highlight the violations imposed by the occupation in the arrest of students and academics, impeding freedom of movement and its influence on education, problems facing academics and 'cognitive occupation', according to

Hammad.

Dima Bustami said: "Through this event, we aim to highlight all the difficulties facing the Palestinian educational process and we also try to support students who have been prevented from pursuing their education by the occupation forces. At the same time, this event raises the awareness of students in general with regard to the issues that are addressed."

This year, the Campaign week started on the 12th of November with a communal breakfast of old and new volunteers.

During the event, a seminar was presented by Professor of Cultural Studies, Abdel Rahim Sheikh, entitled 'Palestine and the Palestinians in the Zionist Narrative'. An open debate was also organized moderated by Professor of History, Rana Barakat, under the title 'Education under Israeli colonial occupation'. She talked about the importance of education in the colonial context and about Birzeit University and the developments in its educational process. The week concluded with a presentation and discussion of a documentary entitled 'They do not exist' by Palestinian film director Mustapha Abu Ali.

The right to education week in European universities

Sundus Hammad pointed out that this year the campaign week was not confined to Birzeit University. Five European universities also observed the event, namely London School of Economics, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Lancaster and Leeds universities.

new approach in employment that supports the economic need of graduates for work and stops treating university graduates as laborers.

The UNRWA response

The acting director of the UNRWA job creation program, Maher Safi, said that the program was launched in 2001 to serve Palestinian refugees, especially after the al-Aqsa Intifada and the rise in poverty and unemployment rates to 42% among workers and graduates. Safi explained that the job creation program consists of two subsidiary programs to serve people: the first was launched to address ordinary unemployment and provide services to those living in poverty and who benefit from food aid provided by the UNRWA. The second program is directed at graduates. Graduates are selected according to their graduate GPA and on condition that the graduation date was no more than three years ago.

Safi noted that the job creation program is an emergency tool to address the situation in the Gaza Strip. Budgets are not usually fixed for this program and are contingent on

donor support. The most important thing is to focus on the significance of this program in alleviating poverty and providing aid.

He indicated that the job creation program provides temporary work in one of the following fields: care, street cleaning, janitors and office boys, and in farming, where women can largely work.

Safi confirmed that this program does not provide work based on a university degree as attempts to do this were rejected because the donor preferred to provide opportunities to workers living in poverty and in greater need of work than others. Therefore, this program excludes holders of university degrees.

Safi also clarified that the number of applications is on the rise. There are 240 thousand applications for temporary job opportunities, but only 20 thousand are employed every year. This is a minority of the applications submitted. It remains up to the graduate himself to decide whether to accept or reject the job when his opportunity arises.



The iron gate at Kufr Aqab ...Could it be the savior?

Bayan Baydoun

By mid-December, the ongoing and growing traffic jam in Kufr Aqab that causes chaos and grumbling on a daily basis among residents and people obliged to drive their cars through that area, prompted the municipality, after consultations with the Higher Council of Traffic and both suburban and traffic police, to construct an iron gate at the Kufr Aqab – Semir Amis intersection leading to Jerusalem.

The mayor of Kufr Aqab, Hajj Bassam Meswadeh, explained that the installation of the gate is an attempt to reduce traffic jams in the area, in particular at the dangerous three-way intersection where several schools are located and students' lives are in danger. The gate will be closed for two hours in the early morning and at peak times when traffic jams usually occur.

Hajj Meswadeh says that the municipality resorted to the idea of a gate after realizing that peak hours at the intersection are not permanent and the gate can be opened during quieter periods. He added that the municipality was obliged to take this decision after an in-depth study of the issue because there are no laws in effect in Kufr Aqab, whether Palestinian or Israeli laws.

The Mayor quoted a sum of NIS 40,000 to install the gate, including construction costs and surveillance cameras. This has been paid entirely from the municipality budget; most Kufr Aqab residents refrain from supporting developmental work by the municipality and some are even unwilling to repair the sewage system for their houses. In recent days, Hajj Meswadeh has seen the gate succeed in reducing the traffic jam as it prevents forbidden entry and driving against the flow of traffic, thus reducing traffic accidents.

The financial director of Kufr Aqab municipality, Asaad Hamouri, said that the iron gate was only installed after ascertaining that concrete blocks were useless, and they are also difficult to move. This decision was made after many attempts that failed to solve the traffic jam problem. In addition, shooting at the traffic lights on the intersection destroyed these totally although the municipality had earlier covered repair costs of NIS 100,000.

Hamouri added that the municipality listened to the opinions of drivers about the gate and it was well received, although some people complained, especially shopkeepers.

According to the Mayor and financial director, the municipality is planning to construct a bridge for pedestrians in early



Part of the work for the construction of the gate.

2017 in the same area because the iron gate is not at all safe for children to cross. The gate may minimize the traffic jam by 40% in the crowded area of Kufr Aqab, which is the result of the growing population and the large number of cars crossing to Jerusalem and the southern governorates.

Although the municipality installed cameras for surveillance and security, the gate was recently subjected to attempts to sabotage it by breaking it. Hajj Meswadeh claimed that young adolescents are responsible and their parents will be approached to punish them. He may even call in the suburban police, asserting that the municipality will not tolerate any act of sabotage.

Asaad Hamouri clarified that opposition to the iron gate by some people is attributed to the mental association that Palestinians make with iron gates that are usually installed by Israeli occupation forces on the entrance of settlements, border crossings or jails. He hopes that people will accept the idea and change this perception because it is a safety measure to resolve the suffocating traffic jam. He also indicated

that drivers do not abide by the traffic rules for the roundabout constructed in the al-Zughayar neighborhood, thereby thwarting the objective for which it was created.

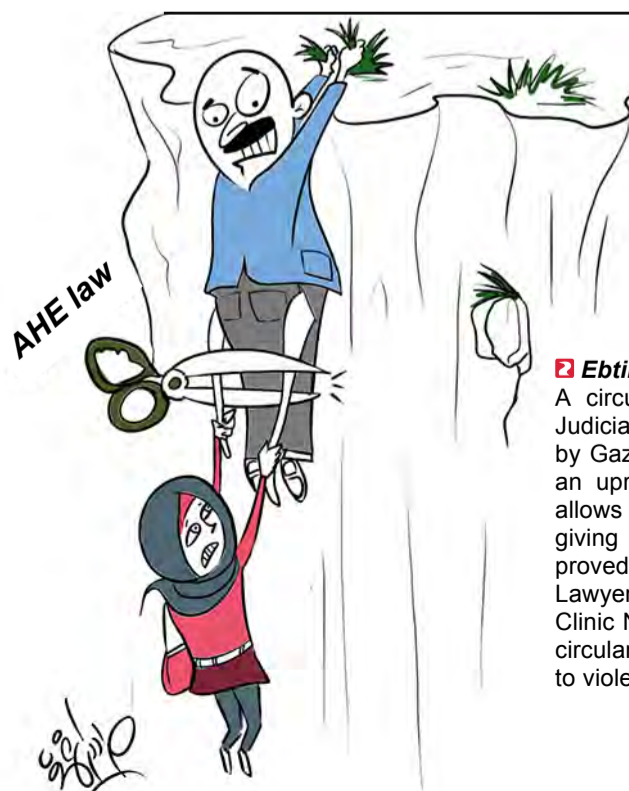
As in all cases, people are divided on the iron gate between supporters and opponents, those who praise and those who complain. Muayad Baydoun does not see the iron gate as a solution and says: "No country in the world has ever resorted to such a solution to solve a traffic jam, as if people live in a jungle. In addition, this is similar to Israeli gates that people are choked by. The solution lies in operating traffic lights, even if they create a traffic jam, or by changing the existing intersection by adding islands, finding alternative roads, and the use of traffic police."

Islam Jilani agrees with Baydoun that the gate is not a solution, although it may lessen the traffic jam on a very vital road between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Islam believes that the solution is to find alternative roads such as Sateh Marhaba to minimize the traffic on the main street, or to build a tunnel from Um al-Sharayet directly to the border crossing.

Together with the growing complaints on Facebook opposing the gate for delaying students driven to their schools, impeding residents from reaching their homes, that it will be destroyed soon, or those who believe that road repairs would be more useful, while others prefer to wait a while before judging how feasible the gate is, there are opinions in support of the gate who accuse those who oppose the idea of chaos and a lack of concern for the public interest.

Student Sujoud Jamil believes that the gate will make the location safer. She said: "Crossing the road by pedestrians is almost an inevitable death adventure. The gate made it safer and easier to cross and the traffic jam will reduce, especially as aggressive drivers driving against the flow of traffic are reducing in number."

Amidst the differences, some voices are heard calling for a huge fine to be imposed on those who violate traffic rules by offences such as illegal overtaking or driving against the flow of traffic as a means to bring about a long-term solution to a crisis that has been disturbing many people day and night.



AHE law on discord and conflict in the Gaza Strip...

Women fear the repercussions of a free divorce for men

Ebtihal Shurrab

A circular issued by the Sharia High Judicial Council in the Gaza Strip, termed by Gazans the "man's law", has created an uproar and great controversy as it allows a man to divorce his wife without giving her any financial rights if it is proved that she was reprimanding him. Lawyer Rabab Shaer who works in Legal Clinic No. 9 in Rafah, remarked that this circular was intended for men subjected to violence who lacked money to divorce

when life was impossible with his wife. However, Shaer believes that "many men are taking advantage of this law, including some lawyers, to make false statements. Some men brought false witnesses from their family to convince the court that his wife was berating him and was granted a no-cost divorce. Some men have even falsely claimed that their wives were committing adultery and divorced them after smearing their reputation." Shaer explained: "This law has been a

disaster for many women who have fallen victim to it, especially as it is based on false evidence of scolding or otherwise." Lawyer Bilal Najjar confirmed that this circular provides men with a high level of protection while women lack legal protection. Although it may be important for some battered men, the concept must be restricted and not used in a malicious manner against women. Lawyer Suad Mashni of Legal Clinic No. 9 described this dangerous circular

Salamatcom

volunteers in Jerusalem assisting patients from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and their parents

Hiba Aslan

When I called him up, lawyer Yacoob Ibrahim had just finished driving a child from Jericho who suffers from cancer, accompanied by his mother, to the Israeli Shaare Zedek Medical Center. He was also waiting for the arrival of another child to accompany him to Hadassah Hospital in Ein Karem.

Taking patients to hospitals is part of the volunteer work performed by Yacoob and his colleagues at the Salametcom Association [For your wellness and safety] which comprises volunteers from Jerusalem and the occupied territories of 1948. They assist patients and their parents who come from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for medical treatment in Jerusalem hospitals and medical centers.

Transferral and other services

The transfer of patients from Israeli barriers and checkpoints to hospitals in occupied Jerusalem is not the only volunteer work that the Salametcom team engage in. According to each individual's skills, qualifications and time available, the team help patients by offering translation services, providing medication, food, and clothes, escorting patients, and providing psychological support to patients and their parents in distress away from their homes.

The Salametcom team find out about the needs of patients and their parents through social workers in Israeli or Arab hospitals in Jerusalem who contact one of the ten key team members to distribute tasks as convenient.

Tayseer Elayaan (37 years old) studied emergency medicine and has been one of the volunteers with Salametcom team since its inception. He has a medical background and can escort patients and their parents, translate what doctors say, and explain the health conditions of the children.

Sometimes it is Tayseer's turn to drive patients to the hospital, or transfer extra medication from one patient to another, or obtain something from the Association's store donated by a woman from Abu Ghosh village; everyone of any class and age can contribute in their own way.

Tayseer says: "I feel that I am a savior for these people. They are inhibited by fear but having me as an Arab by their side creates a sense of security in a place where the language and culture are different. We are there for them at the right time."

The concept of Salametcom

Salametcom was an idea that occurred to Yacoob Ibrahim, from the village of Abu Ghosh. He started to put it in place with very limited capabilities and at the end of its second year, it turned into a registered association operating legally. The team, which numbers more than 100 people, works on the principle of volunteering. They move between a number of medical centers in Jerusalem and across Israeli barriers.

The objective of Salametcom, whose logo is "Despite the pain, there is hope", is safety for all, hence the name of the Association. Safety and wellbeing for patients and their parents, volunteers and donors; support for recovery from illness; reaching hospitals safely; and the return of volunteers safe to their homes is a simple and honorable concept that is implemented with the utmost confidentiality. For example, selfie pictures are not allowed and complete discretion is observed.

Hanin Majadleh believes that it is a national duty to volunteer with Salametcom. She works with a team where volunteers complement each other and where they use their spare energy and time for humanitarian work. Majadleh says: "The least that I can offer is to give patients and their parents the feeling that they are not alone and we are supporting them as a second family when they have to be away due to dire circumstances."

Problems impeding the work of Salametcom

The Salametcom team seeks to overcome the obstacles that impede their work and ultimately find solutions even after an initial stumble. The main impediment facing their humanitarian mission is the financial issue, especially when patients need costly medical equipment and medicines. Yet after five years of work, they were able to establish a



network capable of supporting patients with solutions to their problems.

Yacoob Ibrahim, who was behind the idea, talks about other problems facing the team: "There are differences in the financial coverage of patients who arrive at Jerusalem hospitals by the Palestinian government. Some patients are fully covered while others are needy but receive less cover." He continues: "This is a big problem that prompts us to cover the rest of the costs incurred or to provide medicines or medical equipment for patients; the system starts rolling and networking to meet the needs as soon as possible."

The most difficult problem is psychological support, especially in the event of death. "We find it hard to tell a mother or father accompanying a sick child that the child has died. On many occasions, we were the only person a bereaved mother could resort to at dawn to tell us that the soul of her son had risen to his creator. Then we rush off to be by her side."

Facebook and Whatsapp as means of communication

On their Facebook page, the Salametcom team make announcements calling for volunteers and active friends. Requests

from every city appear on the same platform: Some people ask for help and others offer their services or their desire to donate. The team responds rapidly and Facebook is a social media tool that has allowed for more effective and faster outreach to needy individuals.

The Whatsapp group enables networking between the team administration and volunteers. Messages convey the need and the response comes from those who have the time and skills, always giving their time whatever the circumstances.

Every Saturday, Salametcom becomes a kitchen as volunteers prepare traditional dishes in their homes, packing them ready to be delivered to hospitals to give parents a feeling of being at home and among the family that they were obliged to leave.

The team recently posted this photo of Ahmad blowing the candles for his 9th birthday. The cake, shaped like SpongeBob cartoon characters, was offered by Wael, Ahmad's friend and volunteer.

Away from any bureaucracy or protocols, the efforts of members of the Salametcom team bring smiles to the faces of parents and children by making their wishes come true, in some cases for the last time in the patient's life.

as a sword hanging over the neck of many women and depriving them of their basic rights. Divorce is in the hand of a man, so what is the purpose of such a circular that gives men the right to file a case related to discord that is used by some husbands to obtain a divorce and annul all the financial commitments provided in the marriage contract? This is a great injustice to women. A fair decision

The Sharia court judge in Deir al-Balah, Sheikh Ayman Hammad, denied that the discord and conflict law is fair to men and unfair to women. According to Hammad, the decision has its positive side and women can also use it to ask for a separation if they prove they have been battered by the husband, in which case she is granted a divorce and given her rights. On the other hand, a man must prove harm and is given only one month to do that. If he fails to do so, the case is transferred to two arbitrators. Hammad said: "The circular is useful

because it deals with cases of discord and conflict separately. It is impossible to continue with the marriage because a family with a battered man is usually a dysfunctional family that raises children with disturbed personalities."

Hammad stressed that the circular and its use have been wildly exaggerated. Statistics reveal that the number of battered husbands in the Gaza Strip since the circular was issued in February 2016 was small compared with cases of battered wives.

Hammad called for legal courses for young couples who are planning to get married by the Sharia judiciary and invited civil society organizations (CSOs) to highlight the rights of marriage without bias to either side.

Unnecessary law

Lawyer Shehdeh Shurrab from the Bar Association in Gaza stated that this circular is unnecessary because "the husband can put forward the discord and conflict case filed by the wife instead of filing a new case

himself."

Shurrab explained that the circular does not address types of harm or the procedures a man can take to file a discord and conflict case. Therefore, the Bar Association recommends joint collaboration with CSOs in drafting circulars and the need to clarify the required procedures.

Lawyer and activist Fatima Ashour stressed that the circular is completely fair to men but unfair to women since it exempts men from any financial losses or costs incurred by divorce.

Ashour clarified that a battered man has options such as divorce or marrying another woman, while a battered woman is humiliated, beaten, deprived of her children, and has no alternative. So why has such a circular been issued?

She also pointed out problems in the justice system where it is difficult for women to obtain anything, so this circular must be called "Men lose nothing".

Aggrieved women

Islam Mohammad stated that this law allowed her husband to get an easy divorce that deprived her of all her financial rights. He accused her of berating and beating him and brought witnesses from his family. He "got a free divorce while I returned to my family's home with none of my rights."

Noor al-Banna expressed her exasperation with this circular which gives a man an excuse to divorce his wife at any time without paying her financial dues. This is a great injustice because men already have the support of the law and this increases their domination.

Al-Banna stated that her husband recently filed a case for separation on the grounds of discord and conflict. He does not want to pay her financial rights because he wants to marry another woman and is planning to use the money as a dowry for the new wife instead of paying the financial dues for the divorce.

Best photo of 2016

Manar Arouri

In its final issue of 2016, al-Hal is exclusively celebrating the publication of the best photos taken by colleagues during the year. These photographers reveal their strategies and the techniques they use, plus other scenes that leap to the lens of their cameras to be considered as the best shots of the year.

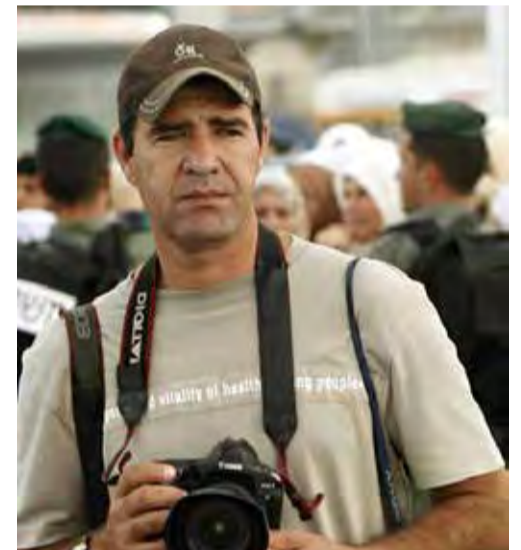


Alaa Badarneh- Member of the Arab Photojournalist Committee in the Arab Union of Photography AUOP- Palestine

This picture was taken on 27 September during the funeral procession of martyr Yaser Hamdouneh. It is an example of photojournalism based on being in the right place at the right time. It is rare for mothers to participate in the carrying of their son's body and if this were ever to happen, it would simply be a spontaneous act. What attracted my attention was the mother of the martyr who was making her way to the front. I thought she wanted to say farewell, but she kept moving forward with a lot of difficulty to the mourners at the front of the procession where a large number of people were trying to carry the martyr. It was a surprise to see her carry the body of her son, in a very touching sight, over a long distance. This was a unique sight for me and I took this picture, which is my most moving shot for 2016.

Abbas Momani- Photographer with the French News Agency - AFP

This picture was taken on 4 July of a Palestinian child sitting in one of the houses demolished by Israel occupation forces in Qalandya refugee camp following an operation by Issa Assaf and Anan Hamed in 2015 that resulted in the deaths of Israeli soldiers. The houses of both Assaf and Hamed were demolished in a routine retaliation and as a collective punishment used by the Israeli occupation to deter Palestinians from committing more acts against the occupation. This is one of my favorite pictures of 2016.



Fadi Arouri- Photographer with the Xinhua Chinese News Agency

This picture was taken on 27 March, the year when Israeli occupation forces demolished 151 facilities in Khirbet Tana, a Bedouin community located in so-called area C. Four consecutive demolition operations were performed in less than two months, displacing residents and prompting them to move temporarily. One of those facilities was the village school which has been destroyed six times since 2011. In the picture, students are seen taking refuge in the village mosque, which is also used as storage for trees and tools as the oldest building in the community and protected from demolition.