

Birzeit stars

According to Munir Fasheh, health is something and well-being is another. While health has a Ministry and departments, well-being needs no ministry but only recovery. We at Birzeit University are masters in recovery, not just today but ever since we broke the barriers of the impossible and proved that we can overcome everything that darkens our skies and shades our stars.

For those who do not know, the stars of Birzeit are many and were earned one by one.

The first star was a token of appreciation from the homeland.

The second was from the mothers of students. These are all different; we are talking about the mothers of students who did not pass as ordinary students: the mothers of detainees, of the poor and deprived, mothers of those whose marks went unrecorded on the eve of an invasion.

The third is a big star from the many devotees of Birzeit: the ever-kindly young brunette farmer called Birzeit.

One last star is left. Who do you think it is from?

It is from those we are talking about in this issue: From you. Thank you and many happy returns to Birzeit University every year.

Birzeit Celebrates its 42nd Graduation Ceremony

On Friday, Saturday and Sunday the 30th, 1st and 2nd of July 2017, Birzeit University celebrated the graduation of its 42nd cohort of 2,050 students. The ceremonies were attended by Dr. Ziad Abu Amr, the deputy Prime Minister and representative of President Mahmoud Abbas; the Chairman of the University's Board of Trustees, Dr. Hanna Nasir; BZU President Dr. Abdul Latif Abu Hijleh; members of the University's BOT and faculty members; several Palestinian personalities; and the graduates and their families.

The University President praised the graduation of a new cohort of students and highlighted that the University was reaping the fruit of 42 years of hard work and constant dedication. He stressed that BZU was initially based in a small building and offered a few undergraduate programs for about 400 students. It has now spread its buildings over an elegant campus comprising eight faculties, runs dozens of BA and Master's programs and a PhD program, and has 13 thousand students, two-thirds of whom are female.

Abu Hijleh expressed his pride in

the University's achievement in the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Ranking, which includes 950 world universities selected from 26,000 universities. He said: "We are walking steadily towards excellence and innovation and are proud to be the first Palestinian university to join the QS Ranking. This is one of the key university classification systems in the world, putting BZU among the top 3% of world universities".

Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Abu Amr, a former faculty member at Birzeit University, expressed his pleasure at participating personally in the BZU graduation ceremony because he was a professor at the University for many years and still belongs to it in heart and mind. He stressed that the University has long been a scientific, academic and national stronghold, demonstrated in achieving a high ranking in a key table of world universities. He believes that BZU graduates will be ambassadors of the homeland in science locally and abroad, capable of withstanding the battle for survival as they are the builders of the motherland and the future.

The University conferred an honorary degree in business administration to businessman and philanthropist Ali al-Haj who donated \$1 million to build a stadium and physical education facilities on the BZU main campus. Chairman of Birzeit BoT Dr. Hanna Nasir said: "Today, we honor Mr. Ali al-Haj whose close relationship with the homeland is demonstrated in his commitment and support to many students on their academic journey. He is a symbol of strong compassion and giving".

Al-Haj thanked BZU for this tribute and addressed the graduates: "It is true that earning a university degree deserves celebration, but it is a springboard for your advancement and success. Learning does not end by receiving a degree and is never confined to academia alone. It is practiced every day for the rest of our lives because the only path for development is through learning. Therefore, I encourage you to keep learning".

The University also honored the Welfare Association, represented by its Director General Dr. Tafida Jirbawi, for its significant contribution to all sectors in Palestine, particularly education. Dr. Jirbawi received

a BZU honorary shield from Dr. Nasir. This special University shield is awarded to the Welfare Association in recognition of its special relationship with the University and its contribution to the economic, social and cultural empowerment of the Palestinian people. The programs implemented by the Welfare Association contribute to creating a caring society for Palestinians and thus, the development of the homeland.

Head of the Biology and Biochemistry Department, Johnny Stiban, and mathematics professor Abdel Rahim Musa each received a distinguished professor award. Manal Shahin, assistant accountant at the BZU Institute of Community and Public Health, received the distinguished employee award for the academic year.

This year's graduates join over 35,000 BZU bachelor or masters graduates.

The University also honored Ahmad Ayesh, former Chairman of the Student Council, who was due to graduate with distinction with the rest of his colleagues but who was detained and is now in an Israeli jail. His family was handed his certificate on his behalf.



“As you leave the house, your fingerprint is the best memento”

Fadi al-Kashef

“As you leave the house, your fingerprint is the best memento” is a campaign launched by Birzeit University to encourage graduates to donate the insurance deposit of JD30 in their accounts to allow fellow needy students to continue their education.

Campaign coordinator Saja al-Sheikh Mohammad said that the sums donated by graduates contributed to three scholarships for needy students during the 2015/2016-academic year. She explained that 700 students had donated and left their fingerprint since the start of the campaign in 2012.

On 3 July, the University celebrated at Aziz Shahin Theater with graduate students who participated in the graduate fingerprint campaign with the attendance of BZU President Dr. Abdul Latif Abu Hijleh.

Al-Sheikh Mohammad stressed that although it was a simple celebration, it expressed the University's appreciation of the generosity of students which contributed to the success of the campaign for the fourth consecutive year. She added that the campaign enhanced the spirit of belonging and gave all graduates the opportunity to participate for the benefit of their university and colleagues.

Abu Hijleh addressed the efforts of students who participated in the campaign and said: “This is the generation we are proud of graduating from Birzeit University, a generation that believes in commitment and giving to the community in time, effort and money. This is a generation on whom we rely to build our society and country”.

Social sciences graduate Mohammad Sayf expressed his gratitude to the University: “Thanks to BZU, we celebrate its excellence and its appreciation of its students. I



hope that the campaign will continue to provide further assistance for needy students to continue their education”. Batoul Othman, a graduate in media and journalism, said that her contribution to the campaign was due to her desire to leave a final fingerprint at Birzeit University, which she loves and belongs to. “The celebration represents the appreciation of the University for its students. This gives the student a sense of belonging as an investor in their university and contributes to the creation of an educated society”.

Graduate Atheer Esnaf, majoring in English Literature and Translation, noted that the celebration was a gesture by the University's administration to its students. She said: “I encourage all graduates to donate the insurance deposit

because it is a very small sum of money but can make a great change in the life of the students who benefit by alleviating their financial burdens”.

She added: “I donated because I have a sense of belonging to the University. As graduates, we want to feel that we are part of this institution where we were educated and where we experienced our most beautiful memories”. Maths graduate Rasha Shadid said: “I wanted to donate the insurance deposit to assist needy students at Birzeit University. It is our duty as graduates to help our fellow students, even with a small amount”. She continued: “I am thankful to the University for all it has done for its students and the imprint it has left on their characters, lives and future”.

Two Tales

Ali El-Haj

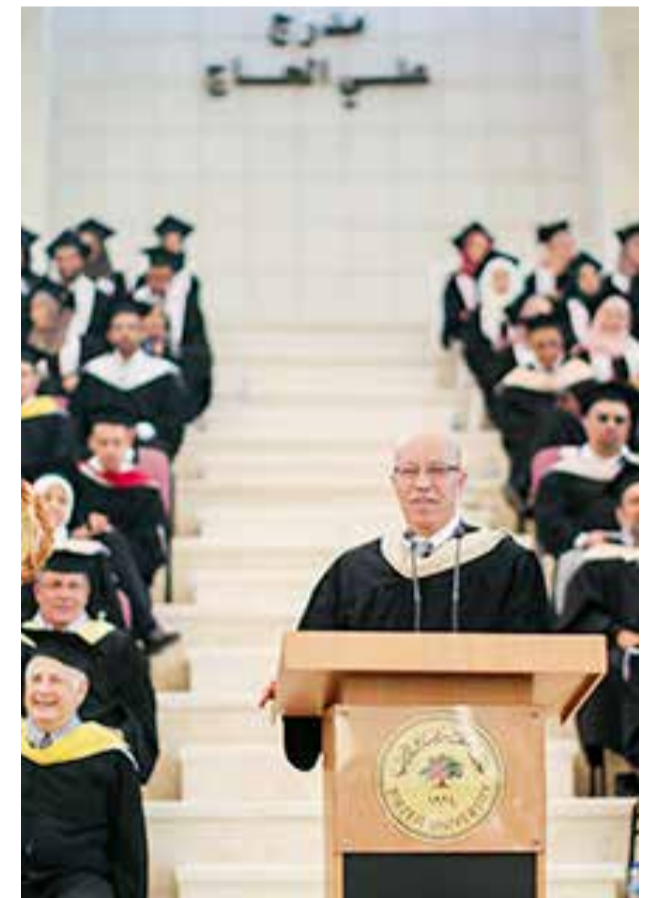
On my trip last week, I decided to visit an old olive tree that I used to know in the hills of Atara. “Zytouna”, that was her name, looked sad, sick and even mad... I sat by her and asked as why the suffering? She began;

“I have been sad most of my life and got more mad and upset when your parents passed away. They were the only link to life in these woods. I live now in an unpleasant surroundings. Just look around, The dirt washing away replaced by rocks. The weeds growing taller than me that I struggle to view the sun. I haven't been trimmed for years except by the goats chewing my branches. I shed no tears when I cry nor sweat in the day's heat as lack of water dehydrated my skin. My leaves are no longer dark green as once been. I am visited once a year by those seeking my fruits. I am expected to produce despite starvation and harshness. They come to pick olives and picking they don't do. They beat me with long hard sticks and they don't care how much pain I endure. My baby branches break and fall, my leaves follow becoming all I use for next year feeding. So you see, I don't want to produce to avoid the beating! The more I give, the harder the beating. I never knew slavery in these lands but now, here it is.. We are expected to be slaves.

I am too old to clean around myself. You know, I am not like other trees. I don't shed my leaves and I hold on to them day and night, summer and winter. I don't smell, have no aroma and my fruits are protected only for people to enjoy. I am the chosen symbol of peace and once loved by the gods. I was honored in Gods books but now; I am an ignored beaten salve expected to provide and never question. I come to expect no appreciation or reward, no respect or thanks.. I am only old “Zytouna”.. I cannot defend for myself and sure this wasn't the dream I wished. Why do the old have to die? The young seem less interested in what we need. Is this the result of their education or it is a new civilization?

I left saddened by Zytouna's reality and kept thinking

her questions... then I went to Birzeit University to attend the 42nd graduation ceremonies. For the first time, being held in a brand new stadium and everything looked stunning. I saw many people young and old, I saw happy faces and busy ones. I pictured how it was 39 years ago when I first attended classes here. I was at the old campus and moved to the new one which at the time consisted of one building. Fast forward and here is Birzeit, a fully functional university with over 13000 students. I was honored with a degree and few kind words, got to enjoy good discussions with several of the university trustees and faculty. I spoke to few students and found that hope is still alive at least in Birzeit. Students leaving their secured places with textbooks and heading to the unknown world of responsibility. Some looked confused, uncertain and others with their plans marching forward. For the first time in my life in this part of the world, I saw something new.. People were enjoying the moment and living only that. People are just focusing on their kids or themselves and their friends graduating from the profession of being students. There were no arguments or fights as I have seen when Palestinians have a chance to gather.. There was no politics and no divisions, there were no fears or sadness.. There was only hope, happiness and celebrations of what has been achieved. These kids weren't thinking about what they have to provide or produce months or years from now. What would Zytouna say if she could witness that? Is it right for people to just forget all and try to enjoy this moment? Is it right to just be selfish for one day? The graduating kids looked like they were celebrating freedom, freedom from classrooms and textbooks. Celebrating independence from labs and exams which enslaved them for the past 4 or 5 years. These kids are feeling the strength attained from education that they have earned. I saw determination in their eyes to follow their ambitions. I only hope and advise these kids to follow through on their dreams. Don't get lazy and don't stay living in this selfish moment. This moment is over and now it is time to go for it all. Follow your dreams



and trust me when I say “Success and opportunity are their for those who seek and work for them”. I felt energy in the sea of the crowds that, directed properly, would revive many “old Olive trees”. I am the same, as old Zytouna, lost my parents and didn't know if I would go back to Atara again. I found a new family at Birzeit, a respecting, loving and caring one. A family that cries for us to participate and join in doing good. I saw a family trying to reshape the future. I found more reasons to go back. My “goodbye visit” turned into “See you again” journey. Thank you Birzeit University.. Thank you for your recognition, for educating generations, for developing leaders and for giving hope. At Birzeit, I saw the future engineers, lawyers, business people and leaders of tomorrow. All wearing the gowns of “Birzeit Pride”.

Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs - Bachelor Programs

Hamed: Diversity of disciplines contributes to enhancing the reputation of BZU and we lack a medical school

Fadi Shatarah

Birzeit University seeks to develop its academic programs to keep pace with scientific advancement and to meet the needs of the domestic market. Thus, it constantly offers new programs in various fields.

Al-Hal interviewed Dr. Mazen Hamed, Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs - Bachelor Programs to talk about the new specializations approved during the past academic year and the main disciplines that BZU seeks to launch in the next few years.

What are the most important programs and disciplines launched by the University during the past academic year 2016- 2017?

The University constantly strives to develop its academic programs and approve specialties to meet the needs of the Palestinian market. Accordingly, the University has launched a number of disciplines that serve the local community and has opened the way for students to choose a discipline that best suits their talents. The University launched the Arabic Music program, the first of its kind in Palestine. The Faculty of Law launched two Master's programs: one in government and local government to prepare Palestinian professionals for appropriate management of public and civil institutions; and a second program in law and economics to bridge gaps faced by law and economics graduates, particularly the drafting of economic policies by creating professionals who are highly knowledgeable and competent in economic and legal sciences. The Faculty of Business and Economics launched an executive MBA program, the first nationally targeting young managers in various institutions to enhance their knowledge and sharpen their professional skills. To develop the programs offered by the BZU, the Faculty of Arts approved a program for teaching media in a new way that keeps pace with the modern media revolution, social networking and mobile journalism without ignoring the basics of traditional journalism.

What was the students' reaction to the new specialties?

In general, there is good demand for the new programs, particularly as most of them are launched for the first time nationally. There is limited demand for some programs due to their nature. For example, the Arabic Music program in which a number of specialized musicians and experts participate from various Palestinian areas, giving the program a special flavor.

How do these new disciplines reflect positively on the University and its students?

The diversity of disciplines offered by the University opens the way for students and provides them with a variety of choices at different educational levels. This will help them to find better job opportunities upon graduation. It also contributes to raising the University's educational strengths and enhances its academic reputation among local, Arab and world universities.

What are the most important programs that the University seeks to establish and develop in coming years?

The University has actually started to establish a faculty of fine arts which will include several programs, some of which will focus on design. The Arabic Music program will be affiliated to this new faculty and will enrich and diversify its specialties. In addition the faculty is expected to launch a performing arts program.

The Creativity and Entrepreneur Unit at the Center for Continuing Education at BZU seeks to launch a "Student Leadership and Active Citizenship Program- MASARI" targeting new students enrolling at Birzeit University in the academic year 2017/2018-. The aim is to develop skills in education, learning, communication, and entrepreneurship to serve the country and community.

Which disciplines are lacking currently?

There is no doubt that the most important discipline that the University lacks at the moment is a faculty of medicine. The University is developing an integrated plan for the approval of this faculty in the coming years to include all specialties needed in the local market. Other than this, the University currently offers all primary and secondary academic disciplines and programs.

How does the University usually approve new disciplines?

The approval of new specialties is not an easy process; the idea starts with proposals submitted by the University's faculties and departments to the administration for consideration and approval. After that the competent department is required to draft an integrated academic plan for the proposed program, along with conducting several feasibility studies to ensure the relevance and importance of the program to the Palestinian market since the University seeks to avoid disciplines that have high unemployment rates and few job opportunities. The proposal is then submitted to the Academic Council to obtain approval from the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) at



BZU prior to submission to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOHE) for approval and adoption.

This process is long and approval of a new program usually takes one to two years to allow competent parties to study the proposal well before its approval and launch.

What are the main difficulties and problems faced by the University throughout this process?

The University works extensively to meet its commitments for the adoption of academic programs as approved by the MOHE, but finding competent professors in rare disciplines is the main impediment to the approval of some key programs despite the desperate need of the Palestinian community for them.

Hutaf Zughaibi: Despite illness and early marriage, she found Birzeit University a source of strength and inspiration

Bayan Baydoun

Hutaf Zughaibi did not allow life's difficulties to impede her passion to pursue the education she longed for after a break that lasted for 20 years. Early marriage and raising her four children, plus the repeated detention of her husband in Israeli jails, motivated Hutaf to greater heights on the graduation platform of Birzeit University this year to receive her Master's degree in Contemporary Arabic Studies.

Hutaf said: "Before I was awarded my secondary school diploma, I underwent several training courses during my work as a feminist activist. I also offered many courses on gender and was a member of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees from 1989. However, I had the sense that I still had the ability to pursue my education and that I lacked a degree. I even lost many job opportunities that I desperately needed".

Despite challenges and difficulties that would have deterred anyone and that enveloped forty-five-year old Hutaf, 2002 brought her a different challenge in the form of fibromyalgia or muscular fibrosis, a chronic disease that affects the muscles and bones causing musculoskeletal pain and stiffness. Nevertheless, her determination and strong will, together with the encouragement of her husband and children, plus her

mental and intellectual strengths, enabled Hutaf to keep going and win higher degrees. Nine years ago, she competently passed the general secondary examination, then earned a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Al-Quds Open University.

Prior to her enrollment in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University in 2014, which also coincided with the enrollment of her third daughter Anagheem in the BA Media Program at Birzeit University, Hutaf worked in Jenin governorate as a labor market advisor. According to Hutaf, the labour market for a female is the most important priority for self-development, building economic independence and strength rather than getting tied down by social relations and obligations.

This strong motivation is attributed to the fact that Hutaf finds study and research a refuge from the constant physical pain and intellectual alienation. In the surroundings of Birzeit University she found the intellectual and cultural identity she had always sought. She said: "Birzeit University was a source of strength and inspiration for me as I found myself with a group of open-minded and creative professors, as well as colleagues with whom I could engage intellectually". She added: "I cried intensely on the graduation platform because I was leaving Birzeit University and the professors who offered me total support and complete understanding of



my health situation".

Hutaf will now start the search for a job and looks forward to engaging in the labor market again. In her assertive voice, she said: "I will never surrender and will look for any work opportunity because staying in bed means my end".

“Abu al-Ayesh...Abu al-Ayesh”...the calls that marked the moment a detainee graduated with distinction

Fadi al-Kashef

On the third day of the Birzeit University's 42nd graduation ceremony, students, professors, employees and families at the event stood up and cheered “Abu al-Ayesh...Abu al-Ayesh”.

Their voices will resonate forever in the mind and spirit of the parents of graduate Ahmad Ayesh. They attended the ceremony to receive the certificate on behalf of their son who is imprisoned by the Israeli occupation and deprived of sharing this precious moment that he had waited years for with his friends.

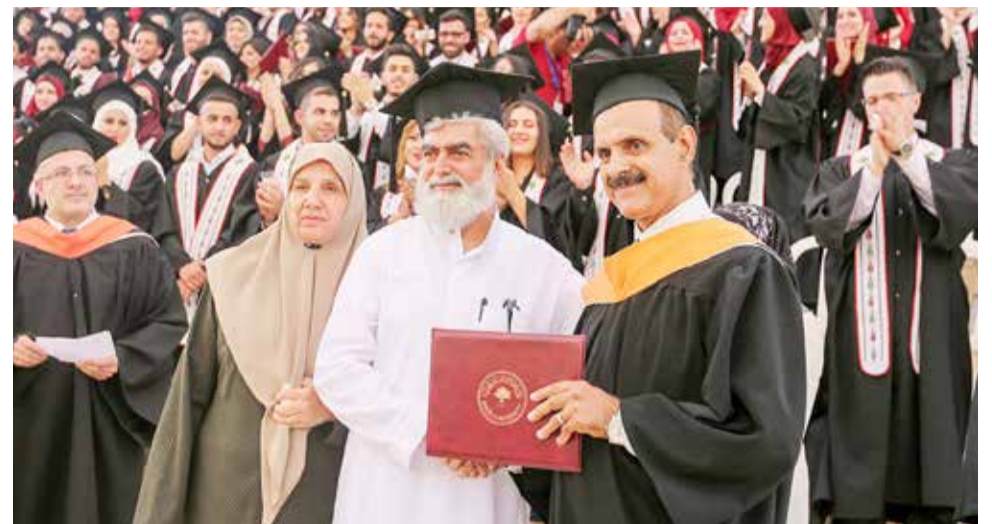
When the parents of the detainee mounted the stage, the air filled with cheers and warm applause. The sound rose of al-Ayesh's friends chanting his name aloud and it was as if he and all other detainees were present.

Al-Ayesh was detained by the Israeli occupation in Ofra jail west of Ramallah but was present in the hearts of the University's family of students, professors

and employees. He loved his University and was head of the Student Council in 2015/2016- while continuing his studies and graduating with honors in civil engineering. Ahmad's father Tayseer al-Ayesh told al-Hal that he had received his son's certificate and observed the devotion and pride of his colleagues: “It is true that our happiness is diminished by the absence of Ahmad in an Israel prison but the support of the students and the University administration gives us great pride that our son has been imprisoned for his honorable national stance”.

He continued: “In jail Ahmad learned that he had been honored and this tempered our sadness. We thank God that we felt his presence with us”. He expressed his gratitude to the BZU students and administration for their nationalism.

Al-Hal asked Saheem Murshed, a professor of civil engineering, about al-Ayesh and learned that al-Ayesh was known for his good relationships with his peers and in the Civil Engineering Department for his



activities, diligence, and good manners. Murshed explained that al-Ayesh scored high grades in the courses he took with him. Al-Ayesh was sought by Israeli occupation forces for four months until he was arrested

by a special Israeli army brigade less than two months before the graduation ceremony with two other students, Amr Rimawi and Ahmad Farah, in a raid on their hostel in Birzeit.

A bachelor's degree that took from 1988 to 2017

Asrar Simreen: I felt the world was small in relation to the graduation theater at Birzeit University

Bayan Baydoun

After 28 years at the starting post, Asrar Simreen reached the finish line and stood on the graduation platform at Birzeit University to receive his BA. He achieved his and his mother's dream that was frozen for over 22 years by a decision of the Israeli occupation. Asrar from al-Bireh is now 48 years of age. He started his journey in higher education at Birzeit University, majoring in sociology, in 1988 when the first Palestinian Intifada erupted. The situation was difficult on social and educational levels. The Israeli occupation always thwarts the dreams of Palestinians and Asrar was imprisoned in August 1992 after completing the requirements for two academic years, and a short time after the University campus had been reopened following closure by Israeli occupation forces.

Studying Hebrew history

The 23-year-old Asrar was sentenced to life imprisonment. He enrolled in the open Hebrew University of Jerusalem and mastered Hebrew language, but his strong national instincts prevented him from continuing. He said: “In prison we are only allowed to enrol in disciplines relevant to political science and history. The occupiers want to impose their ideas and false facts on the prisoners but I completely rejected these as contrary to my principles and goals”. Throughout his long detention, Asrar dreamt of the moment of freedom. He also dreamt of going back to Birzeit University to earn the degree his mother wanted so desperately during her long period of patience in which she awaited the return of her absent son. She left this life in 2009 and was not present to witness the joy of

Asrar's release from jail or his graduation.

Four days after the death of his mother, Asrar was released in the second batch of Palestinian detainees imprisoned prior to the Oslo Agreement. He rushed to enrol again in Birzeit University, this time in political science and journalism.

Asrar said that he chose media because “it is the best weapon to communicate ideas and bring the Palestinian cause to the world”. He commented: “In 1992, we held a strike in jail to demand to watch the MBC satellite channel for the first time. We realized the extent of the change and developments that had occurred in the Arab media. I hoped on my release to find a unified Palestinian national media but unfortunately this was not the case”.

Birzeit University: A patriotic and academic institution

In spite of the alienation a detainee faces in the first period after release and freedom, and despite the changes in social relationships and in intellectual and cultural concepts in the home and environment, Asrar tried to reintegrate, especially within his university. He tried to integrate with students who were some quarter of a century younger than him, and tried to cope with their way of thinking and lifestyle. He did not deny that he found these students intellectually and culturally enlightened and open-minded, avidly keeping pace with modern developments.

Although the University's atmosphere was different from what he had experienced, and the Israeli occupation forces had stolen the few pictures that Asrar had of the days he spent there, Asrar believes that Birzeit



University was and will remain a great patriotic and academic institution. He explained: “Birzeit taught us genuine patriotic principles that were not related to sectarian fanaticism. It honed our humanitarian tendencies. BZU created a social and national revolution in the eighties and early nineties, uniting us for one goal regardless of the means”. With a hopeful voice, Asrar said: “After I settled down and got married, I achieved the second goal that I longed for of earning a BA degree and making my dream and that of my mother come true, even after 28 years. The night before my graduation, I worried about being ‘old’ among young people, but when I received my certificate on the graduation platform while holding my baby girl Naeema, who I named after my mother, I felt that the

whole world was a small place in the face of this majestic theater”.

Seeking science and life

Asrar was awarded his certificate as if he was addressing the young people to tell them that there is no despair in life and no boundary to learning no matter what age you are and regardless of obstacles. The doors to learning remain open and waiting to build an educated and cultured people. Asrar now looks forward to achieving his third objective of getting a job that will allow him to play an active role in his community. His message to the Israeli occupation is: “Your occupation wanted to eradicate us and bury us alive, but the Palestinian people can recover from every blow to live and learn. We seek life, freedom and dignity; we do not seek the elimination of others”.

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