

Beirut... We love you

Yes, we have heavy hearts, and the sins that took place against us in Beirut and other places were immense, but our love for Beirut is great because our loved ones live there in Burj al-Barajneh and Ein al-Helwe.

An old woman living in Burj al-Barajneh still offers lessons on love for Haifa to her grandchildren and the sons of her neighbors. It is a class where the curriculum has never changed; a class without chalk or blackboard; a class in which the grandmother waves her finger at the students whose childhood was destroyed to convince them that we come from there and nowhere else. In the alleys of Ein al-Helwe refugee camp there also lives a "mischievous" boy, as described in the Hebron dialect. He understands politics and the games of politicians very well. He sends them spontaneous, but serious, messages declaring that he no longer trusts them or expects anything from them. He wagers that the future is his, that he knows how to "deal with them".

By the way, this is not an issue of threat or intimidation. It is just a game played by young people that provokes fear in some: "A guilty conscience needs no accuser", as the saying goes. "If the cap fits, wear it" applies to them. Listen well... The legs of the oppressors who committed injustices against those in refugee camps and forgot them are trembling.

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The Palestinian National Council – A transitional session

Saleh Masharqa

Article 14, clause (B) of the PLO statute is very clear about convening a special session to fill vacancies in the PLO Executive Committee. This Article has been highlighted as the rationale for the President's demand for the PNA to convene in one week's time. But is one article and one item out of 32 articles in the PLO Statute sufficient? Are we supposed to disregard all the other articles calling for consensus and cling to a stubborn interpretation as we attempt to revive the historical umbrella of the Palestinian people? Shall we ignore 10 years of political life and culture to shelter behind the barricade of an Article in the Statute and lose a historic opportunity to safely reorganize our political arena?

Although Abu Mazen has every right to wave his threat of resignation in anger at the limp, ineffectual 'gentlemen, brethren and comrades' of the PLO Executive Committee, this does not relieve him of the responsibility of leading this body to safety. It is also true that the Arab world is troubling the President and supporting his opponents: Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are playing this role entirely. Qatar does not like the President and Hamas is the only aspect of Palestine that they see. Of course, Iran couldn't care less about Abbas, while Erdogan's Turkey says one thing and does the opposite with regard to Hamas and the PLO. The Americans are not receiving the President and have turned their backs on him, as is apparent from their timetable of visitors. Israel is adopting every means to thwart the President's policies which succeeded in suffocating Israel internationally. Fatah and the other factions are overwhelmed by a difficult agenda of leadership reconstruction. Nevertheless, this does not justify the hasty meeting.

We see it as a further fall from the 20th to the 10th floor if we convene the PNC solely to fill the vacancies of those who resigned from the PNC Executive Committee, which is a minor issue in a Charter created for national rather than career liberation. This belittlement has sparked a losing battle between legal scholars that cannot be helped by use of the term 'special session'.

Be silent, my leftist friends, and halt the sweeping attacks on the Tsar. You too, independents, you are human and follow your interests at times. This is what people will be saying over each pan of fried tomatoes in Palestinian homes where irritating gossip about public affairs takes place. Any resident of the occupied territories and in exile will say: "We want a coherent, respected, powerful and united leadership on which

we can exert pressure with our criticism as this is our way as Palestinians. We freely practice self-criticism and never kneel before a leader".

Solution: Since the invitation e-mails have not yet been disseminated, and since Saeb Erakat negotiated with Meshaal, and Azzam al-Ahmad met with Shallah, and it is a critical political period, the suggestion is to convene a transitional emergency session of the PNA that would start in mid-September and continue for three to five months. For example, committees mandated with specific tasks would be launched, such as a committee to introduce Islamists into the PNA via elections or recommendation, in addition to a committee on election law for future sessions, and a committee on a national Charter from which disputed articles were removed in the famous 'battle' with Clinton in 1996.

The Statute does not contain provisions for a transitional PNA session. Call it an interim session if you like, in which the PNA will voice its policy on the Islamists after three months, will pull the rug from under the elderly and sheikhs who represent right and left wing parties to give them sufficient time to agree internally on their representatives. This is a session that guarantees a national retreat for self-examination about the historic course with the occupiers: Either we replace the omitted articles or suggest alternatives that open the closed box in which Israel and the United States have successfully confined us for the past two decades.

This transitional PNA session would start in mid-September and finish in mid-December in both name and mission. Do not say that this historic moment does not deserve a balanced understanding and political experimentation, as long as this interpretation protects us from turning to God or to political retirement, abandoning our country in a problematic and divided performance.

This week, Hamas will offer more and al-Zahar will strenuously defend the PLO, whose bones he crushed long ago. The communists and Jihadis, for example, may usher in a reality check. This is anticipated and praiseworthy. The public will definitely approve of this moment of political rationalism and the defusing of the PNA crisis, which may also pave the way to dismantling the crisis of the Palestinian Central Council and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

You may fear the word 'transitional'; those in their eighties will recall the transitional council that preceded the establishment of the PLO in 1968. You may discover that the current edition of the PNC is the vanguard that does not retreat. But remember the first PNC session and the founding generation of

Adjourning Councils

فض مجالس!!



young people who wrote the Statute at that time. How exceptional they were and what open-minded 'clever' Palestinians they proved to be. They were not defeated by the stagnant situation and were entitled to a historic transformation. They did it. They did it, and we remain living in their same stage for the past six decades.

In the transitional PNC session, resignations would be frozen and the public people

would return to reproduce their original first political principles/resources. This idea is not fictional but is based on the spirit of the Statute. The public may be silent regarding the entry of Islamists on a quota basis in a first session prior to the elections. Article 31 permits the ending of political divisions and the detachment of the Gaza Strip. Do it and we stand with you. Just do it.

The new draft law for the Journalists' Syndicate: One eye on the protection of journalists and another on regulation of the media

Ebaa Abu Taha

As part of a national initiative to develop the Palestinian media, and in partnership with the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University held legal workshops to discuss the PJS draft law for regulation of the media and protection of journalists. The workshops were attended by PJS members, legal experts, journalists and interested participants. The legal committee that resulted from the initiative covers nine areas of interest, including the legal aspect.

The workshops aimed to examine the draft law and add necessary comments and amendments. The law will be presented to gain feedback from journalists as the initial beneficiaries, and it will then be put forward with amendments to President Mahmoud Abbas for approval.

Nibal Thawabteh, MDC Director, noted that the PJS had devoted considerable efforts to this issue during the previous five years and clear steps had been undertaken by the PJS to promote adoption of its law. She also explained that the delay was not due to the PJS alone, but is linked to a lack of interest by journalists in a law to regulate the media and protect their rights because most of them are preoccupied with press

coverage at the expense of regulating the profession.

Regulation of the media sector

A PJS member in the West Bank, Moussa al-Shaer, believes that the law regulates the media while protecting journalists from the daily violations to which they are exposed. Thus, there is no contradiction in the draft law between protection and regulation, as some argue. If the profession is regulated, protection of journalists follows.

Thawabteh believes that the existence of a law is a legacy of the PJS without which it cannot perform its role. The law will also enhance the protection of journalists as it is the fruit of their needs and reflects their identity. At the moment, the law is in the amendment phase prior to adoption and application on the ground, where the PJS will observe its actual impact on the daily lives of Palestinian journalists.

Tawfiq Abu Shomar, a PJS member in the Gaza Strip, noted that the presence of this law will free the PJS from political taint or from being subjected to external dictates. It is part of the legal system and a legal source that regulates the freedom and practice of the profession. The law will support the PJS just like any trade union in the world by promoting its causes and providing support in international forums.



Legal experts, representatives of MDC, Members of the General Secretariat of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate at the closing session of a two-day workshop to review the PJS draft law

Problems

The work of professional journalism was one of the issues taken into account in the law. Saleh Masharqa, lecturer in media at Birzeit University, noted that there was agreement over the drafting of an article that allows for a professional registry of PJS members, in addition to recognizing the rights of practitioners to benefit from PJS services without

registration.

He added that one of the problems that had been resolved was increasing the quota of women in the PJS council from 20% to 35% in line with statistics that show the predominance of females among media graduates. In addition, the PJS will benefit from one percent of advertisement revenue published in media outlets and minimum wages have been determined.

Palestinian Gas ... between North and South!

Nazeer Mjali

Amidst the talk about Israel turning into a gas exporting country in the near future, and the upheavals within the Israeli government following the discovery of giant gas wells in the depths of Egyptian regional waters, it has been forgotten that Palestine also owns gas wells that have not been fully exploited. Further drilling for other Palestinian gas wells is required. We may need to address a fresh issue of whether Palestine is entitled to a share of the "Israeli gas" drilled in the depths of the Mediterranean.

It is known that two gas wells are located 30km off the coast of Gaza. These were discovered in the late nineties when the Palestinian National Authority commissioned British Gas to extract gas. British Gas started operations in 2000, with the consent of the Israeli government headed by Ehud Barak, and at a period when a positive atmosphere prevailed between the PA and Israel. The two Palestinian gas wells, Marine 1 and Marine 2, are small (estimated to hold 30 billion cubic meters of gas), especially in comparison with the Egyptian gas field (over 800 billion cubic meters) or the fields discovered by Israel in the Mediterranean (the four wells together contain 600 billion cubic meters).

At that time, the discovery of Palestinian gas was remarkable since Israel and Egypt had not yet discovered the other large gas fields. The late President,

Yasser Arafat, realized the significance of the event and sailed to the excavation location, accompanied by political and economic dignitaries, to light the fire in the gas pipe in a ceremonial ritual befitting the occasion. Talks began about selling some of the Palestinian gas to Egypt and Jordan. British Gas included the Palestinian Investment Fund PIF and a private company as partners in the project. Thanks to this discovery, operations started to generate electricity in the Gaza Strip and plans were devised for the construction of two power stations in the West Bank. Hopes grew that Palestinian areas would no longer be hostage to the favors of the Israeli Electricity Corporation.

But the collapse of the peace process following the failure of negotiations at Camp David put the development of Palestinian gas on hold. In the meantime, Israel started to discover gas in the Mediterranean. Egypt started selling the gas previously discovered in Areesh to Israel and Jordan, and Palestinian gas was shelved.

Today, as both Egypt and Israel become gas exporters, Palestine is marginalized. Is this fair? Is it acceptable and normal? It is true that the resources of Palestinian gas discovered are not huge compared to other gas wells, but the quantity is still significant and could prove crucial in meeting domestic Palestinian needs for

at least two decades. As Israeli drilling to the south and Egyptian drilling to the north have located huge underground gas reserves, Palestine can find further resources on the same land and shores. The economic importance of this project is obvious, but the problem is that British Gas and its Palestinian partners have lost large sums of money to date and the ability to exert further efforts no longer exists. As a result, the failure of the project is anticipated, dashing the initial hopes it generated and causing great disappointment. It is a pity to allow such a project to fail and the current situation should not be accepted, but what should be done?

First, this subject must be placed at the top of Palestinian priorities and made an Arab, regional and international issue. Second, we should engage in direct talks with Israel rather than in the negotiations to date between the Israeli government and British Gas and its partners. In the same context, Palestinian rights should be examined in gas fields in the north-eastern Mediterranean, considered today as the 'economic waters of Israel'. But based on which borders? It is known that the borders defined between Israel and Palestine under the UN Partition of Palestine Resolution of 1947 considers Haifa and Mashala a Palestinian area. So what is the position of international law on this?

This entire dispute is threatened with failure if the status quo in the Palestinian situation persists. The existing political reality since 2007 in terms of the [political] division and the control of Hamas over the Gaza Strip is a major impediment to the gas project. Israel can take advantage of this by claiming that Hamas is a terrorist organization that must not be handed an energy resource that can generate millions and enable Hamas to manufacture missiles.

Thus, we turn back to square one. While Israel and Egypt celebrate the good tidings of gas discovery, Palestinians stand sadly by as owners who cannot extract their gas. This is not the fault of Israel alone, nor of the huge natural resources of Egypt and Israel, but also the result of the Palestinian internal situation. Nevertheless, the opportunity is not yet lost and hopes may be revived if operations resume in Palestinian wells and obstacles can be removed. There is hope of a significant boost to the Palestinian economy since experts estimate an annual income for the Palestinian government of about \$3 billion over 1015- years. This income could double if drilling reveals more gas wells. So, are we aware of the seriousness of neglecting this important source of Palestinian income?

Maath al-Natsheh... from Bachelor's degree at Birzeit University directly to PhD

Malek Abu Areesh

Maath al-Natsheh, a twenty-year old student from Hebron, completed his university education in June 2015. This stage marked the beginning of a new chapter and the continuation of a long journey against obstacles and the negativity of other people.

Maath finished his undergraduate studies in Physics at Birzeit University in three years, i.e. a year less than the usual time required for this specialization. He left the university with pride and led the University's honor list in all semesters bar one. This entitled him to represent graduates in a speech at the annual graduation ceremony.

Al-Natsheh says: "I graduated in first position with a 95.3 GPA. My transcript reflects grades of 99% in 11 different courses. The secret is my belief in what I do and my love in doing it, despite discouragement from some people who used to say that I would be lucky to end up as a school teacher. But I did not care".

A new beginning

He adds: "After graduation, I sat for the GRE physics exam to qualify me to study for a PhD program in the United States with an exemption from the master's degree. I achieved a full grade of 990. During the previous month, I prepared for the exam by reading many topics related to physics, whether I had already studied them in university or not. This was the most difficult time for me because I had to study many topics that I had never



heard of before. I started my PhD program at New York University with a full scholarship".

The educational system

Al-Natsheh said that the educational system in Palestine does not take into account what students want to learn. He noted that his average grade at school was never over 80% and he always remembers one of his teachers telling him: "I wonder why someone like you comes to school at all. You would be better to find yourself any job to do". He added: "I had a strong passion for learning during my school years, but I could not find anyone who understood me. In elementary school I was keen on geography and before I finished the 6th grade, I was able to draw from

memory the map of the world and details of all the countries of the world. In intermediary school, I was interested in history and read the history of past empires and kingdoms, and the details of 20th century wars. During my high school years, I was an outstanding student in the sciences and was called a maths genius by my classmates".

He continued: "I recall the school headmaster informing us about a contest in scientific research when I was in the 10th grade and I felt that this was my opportunity. Using a fountain pen, I wrote a 50-page report from memory. It took me two months and I submitted it after the deadline, but I told him that I wanted to hand it to anyone who would be interested. He took it and I guess it is still there, if it is not in

the garbage. Later, I gave the report to several university professors and received no practical response. They were all surprised! Some asked about references!! I tried to explain that what I had written was my own words and I had consulted no references, but they could not understand. Someone even told me that the language of the text was not scientific. I answered that I am only 15, so how am I expected to write in the language of scientific research?"

Al-Natsheh concluded: "Put simply, the secret of success is love, in terms of loving what you do and doing what you like to do. Choose a discipline that you like rather than one that fits the labor market. It is extremely bad to study and work in a field that you do not like just to make more money".

Ma'thoun Tahrir Hammad concluded 24 marriage contracts in her first month in the job

Hadil Abu Fkheideh

She broke with convention and, with determined efforts, achieved a quantum leap for women in Palestine by breaking the male monopoly on the job of marriage officer, Ma'thoun, to document marriage contracts. The long journey started with a bold and successful step, according to her. She sought to be outstanding even in her field of work.

Tahrir Hammad, the first female Ma'thoun authorized to document marriage contracts in Palestine. How did she reach this position? What were the obstacles she faced and how did she respond to her critics? These are her words in an interview with Al-Hal.

Hammad obtained a Bachelor's degree in Law and Legislation and a Master's in Contemporary Islamic Studies from Al-Quds University, Abu Dis. She participated in several courses and seminars in Palestine and abroad. She also trained students at the Birzeit University Law Institute in mock courts. She worked in the Sharia judiciary from 2005 and held several positions during the past ten years that paved the way to the position of marriage officer. She worked in family guidance and reform, then as Sharia state prosecutor, then as deputy director of registration at the Sharia Court in Ramallah, a position never previously occupied by a woman. Today, she performs her job as a Sharia Ma'thoun at the same court following her appointment on the 23rd of July this year.

No Sharia prohibition exists

Tahrir's story started with encouragement from judges in the Sharia Court. With her education and qualifications as her trump cards, Tahrir did not hesitate to apply to the Ma'thoun Committee through Dr. Mahmoud Habbash, the Sharia Supreme Judge of Palestine. The committee approved the application after consideration and examination. Hammad says: "I was really surprised at being accepted as this job was monopolized by men, but my credentials allowed me to take this step and take on this job".

Tahrir stated that there is no evidence in the Holy Quran or the Sunnah that prohibits women from working as Ma'thoun, nor is there even any consensus among Ulamaa (Sharia experts). If such a thing had existed, her application would have been rejected. In spite of much support, other people were negative and criticized her, refusing even to listen her point of view because of their opinion that there are several prohibitions that prevent women from documenting marriage contracts.

24 marriage contracts in less than one month

Tahrir said: "The first contract I concluded was on the 29th of July. I will never forget this contract and the joy that overcame me will remain engraved in my memory". Tahrir has concluded the documentation of 24 marriage contracts in less than a month since her appointment as the first [female] Ma'thoun in Palestine. She stated that each contract will remain in her memory as her steps on the ladder of success.



Ma'thoun Tahrir Hammad

70-year-old Um Fayez...a modern Haja and expert on Facebook, Whatsapp and Viber



Photos of Haja Um Fayez with her neighbors and Ipad, in her traditional dress and sunglasses, and browsing on her Galaxy mobile.

Aziza Thaher

If you think that only young people use social networking, you are mistaken. Grandmothers are not keeping their distance from this technology. Growing old has never been a barrier to learning and keeping up with progress. Haja Um Fayez Takroui, aged 73 and from the village of Aseera al-Shamalia in Nablus governorate, has surprised everyone by proving that she is competent in the world of social networking on the internet.

Ipad and Galaxy

Haja Um Fayez has the latest smart gadgets to communicate with her sons and daughters living abroad in Jordan and United Arab Emirates. She says: "Using the Ipad and Galaxy phone, I keep in touch with my family. Each morning, I send photos and videos to my sons, their wives, my daughters, my grandchildren and my neighbors through Whatsapp groups. They usually reply quickly to ask about me". She adds: "I also use my Ipad to browse Facebook, follow postings by friends and sometimes share photos and videos that I like". Um Fayez says that she recognizes her sons, grandchildren and other relatives from their pictures on Facebook and Whatsapp because she is illiterate. Instead of writing, she uses voice messaging technology or calls

via Tango, Messenger and Skype.

Bridging the distance

Haja Um Fayez says that social networks have reduced her loneliness, especially as she has lived alone since she was a young woman following the death of her husband. At that time, she devoted herself to bringing up her children until they all married and moved abroad. Social networking is bringing them closer, bridging the distances between them and alleviating her boredom. She stays in touch with everyone throughout the day.

Her son Fayez, a resident of the UAE, notes: "In the beginning we used traditional communication to contact our mother via landlines. With the spread of mobiles, we provided her with one to keep in touch. Then we got her a smart phone; she is a smart and quick learner by nature. Everyone encouraged and supported her, particularly the grandchildren, who guided her in using social communication networks. It was not too long before she became adept and remarkable in the world of social networking and we connect throughout the day using sound and image. In spite of her limited education, she has excelled".

Selfies

Um Fayez expressed her appreciation for the new technology that has made it possible for her to become a 'modern

and up-to-date Haja', as everyone likes to call her, especially when she puts on her sunglasses and takes selfies on the Ipad or the mobile. She explains that she has encouraged many of

her neighbors and friends, who have also started to learn the mechanisms of using social networking and communicating by voice messages via Whatsapp.

From the Palestinian Museum



The annual photo of the Spreedon family in Jaffa in 1928. From the Abla and Alfred Tubassi photo collection