

International Womens Day celebrated in Jerusalem, 1981.

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY

On the occasion of International Womens Day, the PFLP Bulletin staff spoke with Jihan Helou, member of the General Secretariat of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and responsible for international relations. The discussion ranged over many important topics facing Palestinian women, including the role and priorities of the GUPW, how the social and political situation both impedes and promotes mass mobilization and the importance of developing our women's sense of self-worth in order to move forward the struggle of all our Palestinian people.

The role of the GUPW

The most important role of the GUPW is to mobilize Palestinian women, to organize their potentials so as to enable them to participate effectively in the national struggle against Zionism, imperialism and Arab reaction. We have a womens union because there is a women's cause; as Palestinian women we share the oppression of our brothers, but we face additional oppression due to the backward social and political system. To achieve this goal of mobilization and organization, we need specific programs

— political, economic, social, educational — that help us promote the situation of Palestinian women. Our women are uprooted from their homeland, and have less employment and educational opportunities... So we work on two levels: general struggle, and socio-economic programs such as kindergartens, nurseries, literacy campaigns, political lectures, cadre training, vocational training and production centers. All are activities that help to change the situation of women.

Of course, we as Palestinian women see our role as part of the Palestinian national movement. When a womens union was first established in 1921, we perceived our role as a national one against British colonialism and Zionist settlements. We never thought that there could be a womens movement separated from the national struggle, because we can't be liberated when our homeland is colonized and our society oppressed by Zionism and imperialism.

We faced many difficulties when the GUPW was formed in 1965. Most of the Arab regimes did not allow any mass or separate movement for the Palestinians. It was difficult to work in the different coun-

tries. This changed much after 1967 and the war, when the Resistance became stronger... Women began to join the struggle gradually, and our role was to help them overcome the backward values that had blocked their participation in the past. So we witnessed a start of women's mobilization after 1967 in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied territories, but there were few women cadre, so it was difficult to really have a womens movement from the grassroots to the leaders. Maybe our leadership had much to learn, but we also lacked a base.

A very important development is that the new cadre from 1967 on came from the base. I remember at that time I was in Lebanon, and we were trying to create a local leadership in every camp. Of course there was enthusiasm, a readiness to die for Palestine, to carry arms, but at the same time there was a lack of cadre who were politically conscious and committed to fulltime work. We faced the problem that when they married their time was less, if they continued at all, as they were not solid cadre who could really defend their position and their right to struggle as women. But this started to change after 1967. Before that some resistance organizations were starting to organize, but it was difficult and mainly underground, so building cadre was hard. It is not easy to build women cadre, as they must face their society and family, and find time to work at home and in the struggle. So we can see that having professional and committed cadre is now one of the main achievements of the womens movement. These cadre are found in every camp, and our main cadre are from the camps...

Social contradictions

It is not enough to say that our primary aim as the GUPW is to mobilize women into the national struggle. You have to facilitate this by changing her social and economic situation to at least some extent, as you cannot make real root changes without a liberated land. All the programs that we sponsor are aiming to objectively change the situation of women in general. When you have, for example, a kindergarten, you are helping to educate the children but are also easing some of the women's burdens, thus facilitating women's ability to struggle. Our aim is to alleviate these handicaps and burdens.

However, there are more sensitive and less clear problems for a woman, such as her husband or father. Our experience — even my own experience with my parents — prompted us to discuss how to deal with our families. It is not an easy thing. I still

remember when it was difficult for a woman to say that she was participating in politics. Politics are for men, what are women doing talking about politics! It was not accepted in our society, especially in the camps. Socially we were very conservative. Sometimes people, when they try to preserve their national identity, hold on to the negative as well as the positive aspects of their traditions, thinking that this is the way they can confront cultural imperialism. In the absence of the Revolution, the camps were very conservative and tried to preserve all the old traditions, thinking this would make us better Palestinians. Of course, when we began to struggle, to carry arms, and regained our national identity and our selfconfidence, then it became much easier to begin dropping some of the old values that don't help our struggle. That doesn't mean we drop them all; I'm always speaking about a process. It is also important to preserve the national identity of the Palestinian people.

First we tell our women cadre to talk to their family about the national struggle. This makes it easier for the families to accept, as they also want to go back to Palestine, to achieve liberation. Their resistance to women's participation comes from fear: they don't want to hear people talking about their daughter, saying she is coming home late or walking in the camp looking for a bridegroom. In our society, it's easy to be criticized.

We tell the women to struggle with their parents, as they represent values that are holding us back, but not to cut all the links. It's not easy. Our experience is that the woman who is not able to struggle with her parents does not become a good cadre. If she is totally submissive and does not have the zeal to take her rights, without cutting her social relations, she will not usually continue in the movement. Those of us who did struggle with our families - and really it's one of the most difficult struggles - became better cadre. We tell our women to struggle for their rights because their parents and society will respect their participation some day. The vanguards have to pay a higher price and be patient. The few women cadre in the camps in the beginning had to bear much talk and criticism, but later on they became personalities and are seen as vanguards.

Many women find difficulties with their husbands. Maybe he's in the Revolution, but still he thinks he should come home and find food prepared every day. He wants to maintain the traditions he was born into, and does not want his life disturbed by changes. There is a contradiction between

what he says and what he practices. We discuss these things in our lectures and meetings. It's better to discuss in a group than for everyone to face their problems alone. Unfortunately, we don't really have the obligatory programs and laws that are necessary. We are still building new traditions only, but we have proceeded well.

Speaking about women, you must always identify at what stage of revolution we are, what threats we face. You can't speak in a vacuum. As a resistance movement, we are still in the defensive stage. We are still defending our existence. In the camps and parts of the South we have what looks like liberated land, but it's not really. You can't compare it to a liberated area as in other revolutions. We don't have an economy we are still part of the Lebanese economy, as is our education system. We are proceeding with building our institutions and practicing our authority as a revolution, but we cannot practice it fully as we don't have an economic base, and you can't really have laws without this. So it is difficult, in the defensive stage, to make really radical changes. We must speak about passing civil and family laws, but at the same time we face daily Zionist and fascist attacks and we must have priorities. That's not to say the Revolution is not taking responsibility, but we need some rules and regulations, at least for people who are committed to the Revolution. We can't have laws for Palestinians everywhere, but really, as a revolution, we can have some civil laws applied to those who are part of our institutions. Here I make a self-criticism for us as the GUPW. We have a responsibility to really start to struggle on this level, to make studies and present a program to the leadership and the PNC. Yet we must recognize that many new unwritten norms have been developed within the Revolution; now girls can study outside, choose their husbands freely, not be dependent on a downy.

Mass mobilization

It's wrong to speak about Palestinian women as an absolute; you must look at different geographical areas. The Revolution's influence is mainly in the areas where was struggle, mass mobilization direct confrontation with the enemy Arab reaction, Zionist occupation or tools of imperialism. Mass mobilization men and women, is much less out of the spots'. We must also look at the stage of the Revolution. Though our organized that been for 17 years, and our people have been struggling for more than 60 years, we have unfortunately not reached

balance of power with the enemy. We are part of the Arab liberation movement, and imperialism's schemes are aimed not only at the Palestinian people but at the Arab masses and resources. Now we are passing through a bad period... Arab reaction is dominating parts of the Arab world, and the Egyptian regime has isolated the great potentials of the Egyptian people. So when we see we are still in this stage, we cannot expect to move as if we were Hanoi. We must recognize our objective conditions. But this does not mean that we as Palestinian women leaders do not have shortcomings, especially in preparing the most urgent social programs to stop the suffering and lessen the obstacles that stand in the way of our women's participation. We need to elaborate such programs, though it may take some time, and struggle for them to be adopted by the political leadership and applied to at least our revolutionary institutions. We have achieved much, but this aim is still to be struggled for ...

Today we have many institutions that we didn't have 10 years ago because of lack of cadre and means. Now we are supported by friendly organizations, the socialist commumity and UN institutions. The GUPW is a leading member of the Womens International Democratic Federation, as well as the All Arab Womens Federation. We have developed strong relations with national liberation movements, womens organizations in the socialist community and the third world, and progressive womens groups in the capitalist countries. Our role with the UN has increased at the last women's conference in Copenhagen. Palestinian women were a special topic on the agenda.

Though we see lack resources, we have been able to establish many institutions. These include 12 kindergartens, a nursery, literacy classes in every camp, several vocaand Beit al Somoud, a center established to care for homeless children from Tel al Zastar. We've reached many women but it seeds development in the structe in the able to mobilize all. When there are attacks, our women and all our people are willing to come out and do entire be entire we cannot maintain this secution when the fighting is over. What we are struggling for now is how to organize these sportaneous emotions into There are changes; we have recommended to the past.

Women's self-perception

but then we come to the warm inside us as a

society and as individual men and women. I know from my experience that, first of all, we don't have enough self-confidence. We were brought up in a man's world, and were limited to the household and working with our mothers. We are raised to see marriage as our goal, while men are oriented to a profession and self-fulfillment. So we have a sort of inferiority complex in a man's society. At the beginning of the struggle, if a woman was responsible politically or organizationally over other women, even other women cadre, she was not accepted. There was the feeling that any man is better than a woman. This is not easy to struggle against; that is why we say that a woman must struggle against her own value system.

Another thing we face is that we live in a bourgeois society - really a distorted bourgeois society - so how do we perceive ourselves as real human beings and not just objects in a consumer society. We are influenced by the mass media and by the education system. It is not easy for a woman to change the outlook of society. People say: Oh, he married a beautiful woman; they never say that she had good understanding or potential. We are not against beauty, but beauty is related to how much a woman spends on cosmetics and clothes. Here the Revolution has really helped us in getting rid' of these ideas. Our participation in the Revolution has increased our confidence. Now women are ready to work with each other and accept each other's leadership, as they see this is how we can gain our rights. Not in a chauvinist or solely feminist way, but through understanding our humanity and potentials.

There are many good and progressive men in the Revolution. You cannot have a womens movement without the support. understanding and cooperation of men and the political organizations. But I think that women have a greater and more immediate advantage in understanding the necessity of their liberation, so there is an opening in their mind to the knowledge that womens liberation is connected to the broader struggle. Men understand theoretically, but in practice they feel as if they are losing a lot. We tell them that on the strategic level it's to their advantage; it's better to live with a comrade as your wife instead of someone who cooks well but is not developing. Men say that we have hundreds of years of backward traditions, or that their work is much more important. This is partly true, but is also an excuse. It they don't struggle themselves against these values, they can become reactionaries in practice, only using progressive words, being two men in one.

When women have even a small chance to change, they do, even our mothers and grandmothers; when they don't have the chance, they appear as if they are defending their oppression. I remember when I was in Bouri al Baraineh camp, in 1969, giving a mass lecture. I said: "You should participate in the struggle. Aren't we equal to men?" Many of the older women said: No, of course not. It's not easy to say we are automatically equal. When I discussed with these women. I found they were bitter, and had lost many opportunities in their lives. Still, it's important not to present the problem as a war between men and women. We must see the objective conditions and what can be solved. You cannot say: Housework is bad, your husband must help, etc. We shouldn't make the women simply rebellious or extreme. The man should provide support, but the reality of our society is that the home is still the responsibility of the woman until we can achieve social and economic changes in the process of production. Only then can we find real alternatives and solutions for all our society.

An example of women perpetuating traditional values is the mother-in-law syndrome: women suffer much abuse from their mother-in-law, but when they become one themselves they act in the same way. This is a result of the traditional society, and was true also in China and Vietnam. People tend to perpetuate the roles of the society they are born into if they are not given alternatives. Also, here a woman is sad if she has a baby daughter. This is because she knows what the child's future will be, and also because she sees with the eyes of her husband. She doesn't defend the backward ideas, but she cannot see the light of her liberation. It is comparable to the working class; many times, when they are not organized in parties or unions, they are tools in the hands of the bourgeoisie because they are afraid of losing the few benefits they have. They feel it is their destiny to be oppressed, so they don't struggle. Not because they like their situation, but because they don't see any alternative and are afraid.

It is the role of the vanguard of women to present an alternative. As the GUPW, our first aim is how to change women from being passive human beings in society to active human beings. This is very important. What do I mean by passive? She is brought up to think that her most important role is in her kingdom - what they call her kingdom to make her satisfied at home - so she is passive; she doesn't really care what happens outside her home, in society or politics. It is enough that her husband, daughter or son is participating, but not she. How do we change her outlook? This is why we stress social and economic programs. Of course she will say, "I love Palestine", but she doesn't think she has a concrete role in the struggle. So we start with the concrete program to change her self-outlook. The mere fact that maybe she comes to a production center at a certain hour means that she has the opportunity to meet other women, to gain new ideas - then she may begin to be more active and productive.

We often say, though not in a chauvinist way, that women are more revolutionary and patient. I was happy to hear, when I was in Vietnam last year, that they say the same. We women have a double interest in the liberation of Palestine — as Palestinian people and as women. We can't see how our problems will ever be solved unless we build a progressive society in Palestine.





WOMEN SPEAK

Um Mustafa is 32 years old. She is Palestinian and grew up in Ain al Hilweh camp in South Lebanon. At 16 she married and moved to Nahr al Bared camp in the north. Prior to the civil war she moved to Shatila camp where she has lived ever since. She has nine children ranging from 15 years to 10 months. Though she is not a member of a resistance organization, she is active in the camp and is currently teaching a course in the literacy campaign.

I like to participate in all activities, even though I have nine children. If I had more time I would give more. I was always enthusiastic to work, but I didn't have the chance before I was married. Now because my daughter is older, she can take care of the children for one or two hours. This gives me more time to participate.

It's the duty of every woman to give as much as she can whether she's organized or not. When the children are older and can care for themselves we can give more. The upbringing of children is just as much a responsibility of the Revolution. Not only the person who carries arms is struggling. We (as women) struggle just as much...

The most painful thing is to leave a crying child at home when I go out to contribute what I can to the Revolution. I'm completely convinced of what I'm doing. Even if the neighbors, other women or relatives try to dissuade me from my conviction, I don't listen to them. I try to convince them to work with me.

When we work with women, we must and take with them on all levels. We must try not to give them any excuse; the problem is children, house duties, etc. must give them extra time to finish block the road to these excuses. We must treat them as sisters, part of the family gain their confidence. We must be them socially. You can't leave them week, then come back; we must be them — take part in their social control weddings, funerals, births, births, births, make them feel part of the family

If your daughters decide to follow in your footsteps, what would you reach them?

Before anything else, I daughters to be frank and to have the courage to confide in me for anything I encourage them to take part in the Revolution and to be frank with me so I can

direct them. I try to tell what's wrong and what's right, so they can avoid making mistakes.

Khadegi is in her mid-twenties. She grew up in the Gaza Strip in the camps. She has six sisters and three brothers. She is married, with two small daughters.

The misery and oppression that I expenienced led me to take part in the Revolution. My father was put in prison by the Zionists They stormed our house and threatened to blow it up. They tortured my father in front of us, and this left a deep impression on me.

My father took part in the 1936 revolt and told us of the role he played in the Revolution. This also influenced me to follow as path. When I was young I used to district leaflets. I also took part in demonstrations gainst the Zionist enemy. When I was older I transported arms from place to place I also helped in delivering funds to relatives in prison.

As a woman, what are the main obstacles you have faced while playing a part in the Resolution.

The traditions of Palestinian society. No matter how patriotic the family is, the traditions and ways of our society impose obstacles. This prevented me, especially in the occupied land, from participating more. It also limited what my family would allow me to do.

Before the '67 war, my father used to the in as in how to use weapons and to be the Revolution. Then are the '67 war and after that the stories of how the entry treats the girls — rape, presented to vistors naked to entry. This had a negative parents, who then began to parents, who then began to have limit on the Revolution of the crystallized the contradictions between my parent's principles and the presents.

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If your daughters decide to follow in your footsteps, what would you teach them?

Til try to teach my children to be courage and outspoken. They are still young, but I'll encourage them to be educated and try to direct them to love the Revolution. My family used to make us fear the enemy, I don't want my children to have this fear. I will also try to release them from the bonds of tradition, but not in a way that they defy them.

PFLP MARKS WOMENS DAY

Comrade George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP, held a meeting with women cadre on the occasion of International Womens Day, and delivered the following presentation.

On the occasion of International Womens Day, I would first like to express to you all the most heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Politbureau, the Central Committee and on my own behalf. I would also like to extend my deepest solidarity and struggle for the sake of the victory of women, their liberation and the victory of their just cause. It is natural to remember our women martyrs, such as Comrade Taghrid al Batmeh and sister Dalal al Moughrabi, as well as all the other women martyrs of the Palestinian revolution. It is also natural on this occasion to remember and salute the wives and mothers of our martyrs; to salute the women comrades and sisters imprisoned in Zionist and reactionary jails and to bow our heads in humility before their patience, steadfastness and continuation of service to the Palestinian revolution, despite the hard conditions they are under.

My comrades, allow me to salute through you all the women of the world, the women

of the Arab nation and Palestinian women. With this salutation, I declare on behalf of our leadership our determination to achieve the task of womens liberation as a part of our continuous and endless revolutionary work — a task that will not come to an end until the complete liberation of humanity has been achieved.

On this occasion, I felt it would be best to briefly note the PFLP's most important stands with regard to womens liberation. We are committed to these stands in our struggle—a commitment that we solemnly promise you and all the masses to fulfill.

Our position on the subject of womens liberation is based on a number of understandings:

First: There should be nothing less than complete equality for women as human beings. In the PFLP, we begin with the scientific belief that the question of equality between men and women has nothing to do with biological differences or with women's abilities in general. In the broad historical context this inequality is a passing sickness. We should not surrender to this matter of inequality. It is like capitalism or imperialism, which respectively represent class and

national oppression. These have been present in our societies for a long time, but have we surrendered to them? The answer is no, we have not. We struggle for our liberation knowing that imperialism will and must pass because it is based on the exploitation of man by his fellow man. In the same way, with the same enthusiasm, we must struggle against inequality between men and women, until the complete liberation of women — despite the long time span that stretches between us and the achievement of this task.

This is the first stand of the PFLP with regard to the question of womens liberation. We stress the central issue of inequality and analyze it scientifically. This provides an economic basis, and this condition of inequality will only change once the economic base is changed.

Second: Womens liberation is of necessity connected with political liberation, followed by economic liberation and then the social liberation of society as a whole. It is unrealistic to believe that it is possible to liberate the masses of Palestinian and Arab women separately from political liberation and from the struggle for economic liberation, i.e., apart from the national democratic revolution that places society on the threshold of socialism.

The path leading to genuine liberation of Palestinian and Arab women is the path of participation in the national democratic revolution. Some women may achieve individual liberation to a certain degree; however, complete liberation cannot be separated from the ongoing battle between the forces of progress, liberation and socialism on one hand, and the forces of imperialism, Zionism and reaction on the other.

Third: At present, the Palestinian revolution provides the most suitable objective conditions for the process of womens liberation. This point reflects the view of the PFLP with regard to the dialectical relation between the Palestinian revolution and the liberation of Palestinian women. You, as comrades of the PFLP, participate fervently in the struggle against the Zionist enemy; you dress the wounds of those struck during air raids and you demonstrate against oppression and attacks. This is the path to the liberation of Palestinian women. The Palestinian revolution provides the suitable conditions for the beginning of the process of womens liberation and the crystallization



of the dialectical relationship between the liberation of women and the liberation of Palestine.

I don't believe that your activities and those of your sisters in the occupied land including demonstrations, protests, nursing, etc. - would have been possible or would have reached such heights if your mothers and fathers did not feel that you were struggling for the cause of all the people. It is in this way that the process of changing attitudes towards women occurs. Thus when a woman really participates in the Palestinian revolution, she is demonstrating the right to our liberation and to her liberation. Fourth: The process of womens liberation is to a great extent the responsibility of women themselves. We have mentioned this before on other occasions, and now repeat this point so you will realize your special responsibility. I do not deny the vanguard role of the party in this process. On the contrary, I consider the party to be the base of this process; however, this must be complemented by a stand which specifies the special role of women. This is what drove Ho Chi Minh to say: "Do not wait for the liberation of women to come from the government or from the party - this is a task you must fulfill yourselves." I do not, naturally, go so far as to cancel or lessen the role the party must play as the leader of the

whole process of change in society — as a leader of the process of political liberation, then economic and social. However, the complete liberation of women can never be achieved without the special struggle of women themselves.

Our joint struggle - men and women's is a revolutionary process which is now taking place and will continue until the complete liberation of humankind and the eradication of all types of oppression and repression in society. Both men and women will participate in the process of political liberation; however, in light of the present situation of inequality, we say regretfully that men will play the outstanding role in this stage. After this the stage of economic liberation begins, and here the role of women will increase in the process of building socialism - the only way to remove economic exploitation from society. But after the process of political liberation (the liberation of Palestine), and after the process of economic liberation (socialist construction), there remains the great task of social and cultural liberation. This is the most critical stage.

On the level of oppression of women by men, you as women must rely on yourselves to a great extent and on the formal programs of the party. We are speaking of a long historical process. We are not speaking now of women's activities in Lebanon or in the occupied homeland, nor are we discussing the current realities of the Palestinian revolution and the dangers facing us. Why? Mainly, because this is a women's occasion. Thus, despite the critical dangers facing us in the political situation which might cause some to despair, we are 100% sure that the process of the liberation of all of humanity will continue, as has been proven by the movement of history. No one should be under the illusion that if we face great difficulties in the Lebanese arena in the coming period, then the process of liberation will come to a stop, making all this talk meaningless. The process of the liberation of humanity will continue, and the conflict between the exploited and the exploiters will continue. History has confirmed that it will only end with the victory of the exploited.

Fifth: Our stand with regard to womens liberation is connected to the role played by the party in the process of liberation. It is true that you as women must bear special responsibility but it is the party which is responsible for completion of the process of liberation on all levels. The party is responsible for reaping whatever benefits can be achieved from the dialectical relationship that exists between the Palestinian revolution and the process of womens liberation. It is also responsible for spreading revolutionary ideas with respect to womens liberation in order to pave the way for the third stage of struggle - the stage of social liberation. We always are struggling on a political, economic and social level; however, each stage has special characteristics. We are now going through the stage of political struggle, aiming at the liberation of Palestine and establishing political authority. After that begins the stage of building socialism, accompanied by a cultural revolution, i.e., the process of ideological liberation. Clearly events in Poland provide an example of how a Marxist-Leninist party should always remain aware that the process of political liberation should be accompanied by economic and social liberation as well.

Sixth: The last of these points is that we in the PFLP consider the stand taken on women as not only a matter of principle but a moral issue. The position on women and their right to equality and liberation comes as the result of moral values. There is a Marxist-Leninist saying that a people who exploits another is not a free people. In the same vein, we say that any human being who exploits or enslaves another is not free. This is the essence of the moral issue in regard to women.

