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THE JACOB BLAUSTEIN INSTITUTE  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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# Perspectives On Palestinian Women ARCHIVES

Information for participants in the World Conference to  
Review and Appraise the Achievements of  
the United Nations Decade for Women  
Nairobi, Kenya, July, 1985.

## **The Jacob Blaustein Institute For The Advancement of Human Rights**

Through a wide variety of programs, the Jacob Blaustein Institute aims to narrow the gap between the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights agreements -- and the realization of these rights in practice.

Blaustein Institute projects fall roughly into four broad categories, albeit with considerable overlapping:

- a) scholarly endeavors designed to clarify basic human rights concepts or issues;
- b) educational and training programs to promote wider knowledge and use of international human rights principles and institutions, to develop a critical public constituency capable of extending and improving them, and to encourage young people to consider careers in this field;
- c) programs that nurture and strengthen human rights organizations and movements;
- d) the creation of a corpus of legal writings for use by human rights pleaders and advocates as they confront human rights violations.

In pursuing its objectives, the Blaustein Institute works with diverse academic institutions, foundations, national and international human rights organizations and legal groups.

## FOREWORD

The 1975-85 United Nations Decade for Women will culminate with the world conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, July 15-26, 1985. The Nairobi Conference is the third international event sponsored by the world organization during the Women's Decade. The first took place in Mexico City in July 1975; the second in Copenhagen in July 1980. The purposes of the Copenhagen Conference, like those of the conference planned for Nairobi, were to assess the progress achieved, to identify the obstacles encountered in attaining the goals of the Decade and to plan how to implement these goals in the future.

These Nairobi purposes are specified in two main agenda items. The review of progress and appraisal of obstacles at national, regional, and international levels is to take place under agenda item 7. Under agenda item 3, the conference is to devise "forward-looking strategies" to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace at these national, regional and international levels up to the year 2000.

The U.S. and West European governments have insisted from the start of UN planning for the Nairobi Conference that its agenda should exclude political questions more properly considered in the Security Council (and other political organs) and that differences should be resolved by consensus rather than majority vote. The Soviet and Non-Aligned blocs were unyielding. These blocs have 11 and 99 members respectively (the latter including 21 Arab states, and a large number of other Muslim states). The differences remained for the conference itself to settle, where these states would have a controlling majority.

Since Israel's creation in 1948, and especially after its victories in the 1967 and 1973 wars, the UN has been the principal forum of the wide-ranging campaign of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Arab and Soviet allies to delegitimize Israel. While failing to achieve Israel's expulsion from the UN, a goal it has not relinquished, the PLO has been able to secure repeated condemnations of Israel's alleged policies and practices. It has also succeeded in impugning Israel's identity as a Jewish state by obtaining in 1975 a General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism. These condemnations have been tacked onto an array of unrelated issues on agendas throughout the UN system, including those concerned with the status of women.

The intrusion into a UN specialized agency, conference or technical program of extraneous political questions is especially improper when these very questions are repeatedly addressed in the UN's political organs that exist for that very purpose. As the UN Secretary-General has urged, "the public forum afforded by the United Nations...not [be] wasted on the exchange of useless accusations that offer no hope of bridging differences." (Lecture, Harvard University, January 10, 1985; SG/SM/3648, p. 6).

Over the objections of the U.S. and other members of the Nairobi planning bodies, the subject of Palestinian women has been placed on the Nairobi agenda, under item 7. A Report of the Secretary-General (hereafter referred to as the SG Report), entitled "The Situation of Women and Children Living in the Occupied Arab Territories and Other Occupied Territories," is the documentation on which basis the subject will be considered.

The subject was placed on the agenda in response to a General Assembly recommendation that the conference pay particular attention to the problems of women in territories under "racist or colonial rule" or "foreign occupation," taking into account the Mexico City and Copenhagen guidelines. Since the subject of Palestinian women had been discussed in Copenhagen, the Nairobi preparatory body (the Commission on the Status of Women) decided, in carrying out the General Assembly's recommendation, to request the Secretary-General to update an earlier (1982) report it had prepared on this subject. Although the title of the SG Report speaks of "occupied Arab territories" and of "other occupied territories," the Report itself mentions none of the latter -- much less discusses in detail the problems of women in them -- for example, the occupied territories of Afghanistan, Kampuchea and Chad. The Report deals exclusively with Palestinian women, obscuring or minimizing Israel's achievements in the West Bank and Gaza and, moreover, assuming that Israel is at fault for unsatisfactory conditions -- real or imagined.

At the request of the Jacob Blaustein Institute, Dr. Mala Tabory, a legal scholar and social scientist, undertook a study intended to provide participants in the Nairobi Conference with another perspective beside that contained in the SG Report. Concerned about the situation of women worldwide, the Institute felt that it was important for the conference attendees to have a document that contributes to a balanced and constructive view of the controverted subject of Palestinian women.

Dr. Tabory drew in her research for the full study (which is available on request) from both Arab and Israeli published sources as well as on the documents of several UN agencies. Most important, she visited factories, vocational schools and health centers in the West Bank and Gaza to interview Palestinian women about their situation.

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A convenient digest of Dr. Tabory's findings follows. It is divided in keeping with the main headings in her text: demography and vital statistics; employment; working conditions; education, including vocational training; health; and environmental sanitation. Thanks are due to Kenneth Bandler, Allan Kagedan and Phyllis Sherman for preparing the digest.

As established in Dr. Tabory's study, and indeed admitted in the SG Report, the latter's account of the situation of Palestinian women and children is not truly a "report" -- much less an impartial one. It not only disregards Israel's information and viewpoint, it fails to apply elementary evaluative criteria, such as comparison of present with pre-1967 conditions. Nor does it take into account the bearing of Arab/Muslim religious traditions and social patterns on the situation of Palestinian women. Its method appears to be to assert as a general proposition that the Israeli occupation is per se harmful to all Palestinians, from which is extrapolated, without specific evidence, the conclusion that it must be damaging to Palestinian women and children.

This perception of the SG Report is borne out by the statement in its introduction that "As no comprehensive study related to the status of Palestinian women has been prepared within the United Nations system during the last year,...it [the SG Report] draws exclusively on recent reports and other material dealing with various aspects of living conditions of Palestinian people in the Arab occupied territories, prepared by United Nations bodies." That the Report is indeed based on prior UN documents, which themselves reflect an anti-Israel bias, is evident from its 82 bibliographical notes, only four of which cite Israeli sources. The rest are drawn from the reports of the General Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, serviced by the UN Secretariat's Palestine Centre. The Committee -- whose member states are Senegal, Cuba and Afghanistan -- and the Centre, are known to reflect the views of the PLO.


Other statements in it confirm this impression of the SG Report: "Although none of these reports refer specifically to the question of Palestinian women, they describe the living conditions of the Palestinian population as a whole"; "The policy of the occupying power uniformly affects men, women, youth and children as members of society"; the military authorities' "oppressive practices...affect equally all members of the family." In short, the authors of the Report, unwilling or unable to prepare a particularized study of the situation of Palestinian women, simply repeat the generalized criticism of Israel's occupation common to many UN documents.

Among the other sources cited in the SG Report are the reports of the Mexico City and Copenhagen conferences. The Mexico City Conference was widely criticized as politicized, especially for including in its final Declaration a call to the international community to seek



the elimination of Zionism along with racism and apartheid. The linking of Zionism with these evils served as precedent for the General Assembly's adoption on 10 November 1975 of the mischievous and dangerous resolution falsely equating Zionism with racism. The Copenhagen Conference extended this falsehood, restricted to the Declaration adopted in Mexico City, into a Program of Action for improving the situation of women worldwide.

The UN Charter declares the determination of all the peoples of the United Nations "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small." In sharing that faith, the Jacob Blaustein Institute expresses the hope that the Nairobi Conference will not be diverted into extraneous political bypaths but will rather direct its energies to the real issues of women, and thereby truly contribute to attaining the goal of equal rights for men and women the world over.



Sidney Liskofsky  
Program Director  
Jacob Blaustein Institute for  
the Advancement of Human Rights

## DEMOGRAPHY AND VITAL STATISTICS

The SG Report's discussion of the demography and vital statistics of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians gives readers an inaccurate picture of the effects of Israeli occupation. Among other inaccuracies, it fails to record the significant advances in health care made since 1967.

### Palestinian Population Overall

The SG Report admits that "it is difficult to know exactly how many Palestinians there are altogether" (par. 10). Estimates published by Arab countries and by the PLO, and even by UNRWA, have been found to be exaggerated, reflecting a political purpose to magnify the "refugee problem." In fact, with the exception of the West Bank and Gaza, no formal census of the Palestinian populations in Middle East countries has ever been conducted.

### Refugee Camp Population

The SG Report asserts that some 50 percent of the West Bank population and 85 percent of the Gaza population are refugees registered with UNRWA (par. 10). It claims that as of June 1984 there were 350,779 refugees registered in the West Bank (90,905 in camps) and 410,745 in the Gaza Strip (226,937 in camps). It bases these figures on 1983 UNRWA refugee registration lists and 1981 Israeli government statistics for the total population. However, UNRWA itself has stated that the registration figures "do not necessarily represent the actual population of Palestine refugees in their places of registration; the refugees move and do not always inform the Agency; they also die without their families informing the Agency."<sup>1</sup>

By 1983, according to Israeli census figures, there were 105,000 refugees living in the West Bank (65,000 in camps) and 205,000 in Gaza (175,000 in camps).<sup>2</sup> These figures show that only 14 percent of the West Bank population and only 42 percent of the Gaza population are refugees, in contrast to the SG Report's figures of 50 and 85 percent, respectively.

### Population Growth

Before 1967, despite high birthrates, the population of the West Bank and Gaza was relatively static. This was due to high infant and other mortality and to extensive emigration. Since then, improved

economic conditions and a decline in net out-migration have led to rapid population growth. Thus the Gaza Palestinian population increased from 364,000 in 1969 to 476,000 in 1982, and the West Bank Palestinian population grew from 164,000 in 1967 to 747,500 in 1982.

### Infant Mortality

During the period 1967-82, infant mortality in the West Bank and Gaza was reduced by more than 50 percent.<sup>3</sup> The reported infant mortality rate in 1982 in the West Bank was 25.6 per 1,000 live births, and in Gaza 41.3 per 1,000.<sup>4</sup> These figures compare favorably with available data on infant (0-1 year) mortality rates for 1981 in neighboring Arab countries. For example, infant deaths per 1,000 live births in Jordan were 68; in Egypt 80; in Syria 61; and in Saudi Arabia 112. The infant mortality rate in Israel was 13.9 per 1,000.<sup>5</sup>

Infant mortality in the West Bank and Gaza has declined in part because of the extensive development and utilization of health services, including the establishment of primary health care units, visits by public health staff to remote villages, availability of health insurance, increased public demand for health care, and UNRWA supervision of refugee camps.

### Child Mortality

During 1981-83 child (0-5 years) mortality rates averaged 7.0 per 1,000 in the West Bank and 10.3 in Gaza. In countries with very poor health conditions, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the under-six mortality rate exceeds 100 per 1,000; in highly developed countries it is as low as 2.0 per 1,000.<sup>6</sup>

### Life Expectancy

Improvements in medical services and health conditions among the Palestinians have resulted in higher life expectancy. In 1967, life expectancy at birth was estimated at 48 years in the West Bank and Gaza. In the mid-1970s it was estimated at 55, and in the early 1980s at 62. Again, this most recent figure compares favorably with the figures for neighboring countries: 61 in Jordan, 56 in Egypt, 66 in Syria, and 55 in Saudi Arabia. In Israel life expectancy is 74 years.

### Emigration

The SG Report states that "the high male emigration rate" from the West Bank and Gaza "has created a ratio of 80 males to 100 females." This figure is inaccurate. In 1983, there were 996 males per 1,000 females in the West Bank and 991 males per 1,000 females in the Gaza area.

Of course, West Bank and Gaza residents do emigrate; migration for economic reasons is common throughout the world. In the Middle

East, workers have migrated from the more densely populated, labor-surplus countries to the Arab oil-producing countries along the Persian Gulf. Due to their educational level and technical training, workers from the West Bank and Gaza have been in demand by states with extensive resources but limited trained manpower. In 1982, there were 400,000 Palestinians in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. They constituted some 40 percent of Kuwait's total work force.

During 1982 and 1983, reported net out-migration from the West Bank and Gaza declined significantly from previous years, due to improved economic opportunities and socioeconomic conditions at home, and to newly imposed immigration restrictions in Arab countries, reflecting declining oil revenues.<sup>7</sup>

#### Female Heads of Household

The SG Report, citing UNRWA statistics for 1983, states that "on the West Bank there were 27,226 female heads of household out of a total of 72,272 and in the Gaza Strip 14,567 out of a total of 75,296." The Report fails to mention that "Roughly 25-33% of all households in the world are de facto headed by women, with the percentage much higher in certain countries and regions... The rising incidence of female-headed households in rural areas of developing countries results from impoverishment and migration."<sup>8</sup> According to the UNRWA figures, roughly 38 percent of all West Bank households and 19 percent of all Gaza households are headed by women, figures that compare favorably with others in the developing world.

#### Conclusion

During the period of the Israeli administration, the Palestinian population has undergone rapid growth, resulting from significant improvements in economic and health conditions that markedly reduced infant and child mortality rates and increased life expectancy. The SG Report ignores these achievements.

## EMPLOYMENT

Any assessment of the economic health of the administered territories must take into account the past. Before 1967, Jordan neglected the West Bank in favor of the East Bank. High unemployment depressed economic life in both the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli occupation has witnessed rapid economic growth and unprecedented employment opportunities. Income from employment in Israel has increased West Bank purchasing power and contributed to local economic improvement. From an economic standpoint, the Israeli administration has had a favorable impact on the West Bank and Gaza.

### Labor Force Participation

To be sure, as the SG Report implies, the level of Palestinian women's labor force participation is low; but the participation level of women in Arab countries generally is even lower. This is a result of high fertility, low literacy, and traditional restriction of women to domestic roles. Indeed, the Palestinian women's labor force participation rate compares favorably with those of Arab women elsewhere. Thus, according to the SG Report, the participation rate for women in the West Bank is 18.7 percent, in Gaza 6 percent; the figure for Egypt is 5.7 percent, for the United Arab Emirates 5.8 percent and for Yemen 5.6 percent.<sup>1</sup>

### Traditional Position

After noting the alleged absence of employment opportunities for Palestinian women, the SG Report comments that these same women, presumably taking advantage of employment opportunities, are being uprooted "from their traditional position in society."

It is valid, of course, to explore how women's employment may affect a traditional culture, weighing this against how it can help women to gain dignity. The complex question of the needs of women as individuals as against the demands of family and community is hardly restricted to Palestinian women; it affects women in all modern and modernizing societies. This is not an issue of Israeli policy, which seeks neither to encourage nor dissuade Palestinian women from working, for the very reason that Israel wishes to avoid accusations that it is imposing its values on a traditional Arab culture. Arab girls generally work for only a short time before marriage. Their youth and early marriage inhibit the acquisition of job skills. Thus Arab (including Palestinian) women tend to be confined to unskilled

occupations. Once married, traditional mores inhibit them from working outside the home.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

With regard to employment, Palestinian women in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, are better off than women generally in Arab countries. Israel has opened up new job opportunities for those women who choose, of their own accord, to seek employment.



## WORKING CONDITIONS

Unfortunately in many countries, women's working conditions are inferior to those of men. The SG Report provides a distorted picture of the working conditions of Palestinian women, inaccurately portraying them as "exploited," poorly paid workers who work illegally and receive no health or other benefits (par. 39). The Report mentions three categories of Palestinian working women: women employed legally in Israel; women employed legally in the West Bank and Gaza; and women working illegally in Israel. Each category merits separate consideration.

### Legal Employment in Israel

The SG Report fails to mention a key institution in the lives of Palestinian women employed legally in Israel: the union. Israeli's Histadrut, encompassing 90 percent of the country's workers, actively encourages Palestinian men and women who work in Israel to join its ranks, though few have actually done so. The Histadrut welcomes Palestinians not only because it has always opposed discrimination but also because nonunionized workers threaten the wage levels of unionized workers. Palestinians who belong to the Histadrut enjoy the same benefits as Israeli members, including severance pay, work accident insurance, vacation pay, sick pay, child allowances, clothing allowances, a spouse allowance, religious holiday pay, access to health services and medical insurance.<sup>1</sup>

Most Palestinian men and women who work in Israel choose not to join the Histadrut because they do not wish to be seen cooperating with Israel.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, even these workers benefit from collective agreements reached by the Histadrut covering the enterprises where they work.

What effect does working in Israeli factories have on Palestinian women workers? According to Raymonda Tawil, a Palestinian writer, equality has increased the women's self-esteem. In many cases, they were the only wage earners in their family, and it was precisely this role as breadwinner that imposed a great responsibility upon them and at the same time gave them a feeling of dignity.<sup>3</sup>

### Legal Employment in the West Bank and Gaza

What of Palestinian women who work in the West Bank and Gaza? Free union activity exists in the territories, and as of 1985 there

are 31 unions in the West Bank and seven in Gaza.

If a small percentage of West Bank and Gaza workers, as compared with Israeli workers, are unionized, this is not surprising. Local economies have been and remain largely agricultural and therefore unreceptive to unionization. Nonetheless, the Israeli administration in the territories has taken actions to improve local working conditions including some intended to assist women in particular. It has regulated work hours, protected the right to not work at night, banned women's employment in dangerous occupations, and increased maternity leave from 21 to 45 days.

Perhaps the best evidence of the progress in employment made by Palestinian women working in the West Bank and Gaza is the number of women working in teaching and other white-collar jobs. In the West Bank, there are 363 female school directors, 6,475 teachers, and 655 health service workers.<sup>4</sup> These women are not only benefiting personally from the experience gained in these occupations, but they are assisting members of their community to live productive lives.

#### Illegal Employment in Israel

The third category of Palestinian working women are those who choose to work illegally in Israel. What motivates this choice? The families of these young women, wishing guidance and protection for them, fall prey to the Rais, an illegal labor recruiter who hires them out to hotels, restaurants and agricultural enterprises and deprives them of a high percentage of their wages. The Israeli government seeks to stem the tide of illegal workers and has no interest in perpetuating such circumvention of the law, including tax evasion and the prohibition against employing youths under 17. The Histadrut actively tries to persuade illegals to work legally and to join the union since illegals drive down all workers' wages.

The SG Report notes that Palestinian women generally fill jobs at the lower end of pay scales. This is true -- but so do women in many countries, as anyone familiar with the condition of women internationally knows. In Canada, for instance, women typically earn between 50-60 percent as much as men. The reasons for this are multiple. In short, it is a widespread problem in many regions that should be addressed by the Nairobi Conference.

#### Conclusion

Many aspects of the situation of Palestinian women "deplored" in the SG Report are the very problems discussed in the Nairobi Conference document on women in developing countries. Palestinian working women in the West Bank and Gaza share problems that face women in developing and even developed countries, but by any measure their working conditions have improved since 1967.



## EDUCATION

Education provides the foundation for future employment and for citizen participation in cultural and public life. In its discussion of education provided by UNRWA as well as by private Arab institutions, from the preschool to vocational training, the SG Report highlights alleged Israeli harassment of Palestinian students. Such incidents have to be viewed from the perspective of Israeli security requirements in the face of the sometimes violent student demonstrations. In any event, the SG Report barely discusses the broader question of education, much less gives an account of Israeli contributions to education in the West Bank and Gaza.

### Literacy

Literacy is the basis for all further education. In the West Bank and Gaza, the rate of illiteracy has declined since 1967, placing residents of these regions ahead of Arab countries. From 1970 to 1984, the percentage of illiterate women declined in the West Bank from 65 to 39 and in Gaza from 65 to 37. In Arab countries, the percentage of illiterate women is higher: Algeria (1982) 68, Egypt (1976) 77, Jordan (1979) 49, Saudi Arabia (1980) 87, Syria (1975) 76.<sup>1</sup>

Paralleling the rise in literacy is the increase in the number of students at all educational levels. The overall student population of the West Bank and Gaza grew 104 percent between 1967 and 1985 while the school-age population increased only 28 percent. The number of school girls aged 5-18 increased 125.3 percent, reflecting a jump in attendance at all three school levels: elementary and junior high (both compulsory) and high school (voluntary).<sup>2</sup>

Five universities have been established in the administered territories since 1967. Similarly from 1980 to 1985 the number of women students doubled (from 2,599 to 4,680) in teachers' seminaries and agricultural, technical and paramedical colleges.<sup>3</sup>

### Vocational Schools

Since 1968, Israeli government-supported vocational schools have trained 55,000 West Bank and Gaza young women and men. Today, there are 23 of these schools, 18 in the West Bank and five in Gaza. Nine of these offer courses where women learn more "traditional" skills such as sewing, knitting and weaving, useful at home as well as in the workplace, and newer skills such as driving instruction. Thus far,

about 10,000 women have enrolled in these courses, 7,000 from the West Bank and 3,000 from Gaza. These courses, which are publicized in the media, are free of charge and attending students receive a small stipend and work clothes.

The quality of the instruction students receive in the government-financed training centers is proved by the fact that graduates easily find employment in Arab countries, where they sometimes serve as instructors. The International Labor Office's (ILO) reports on this subject describe the vocational schools as a "positive feature" of Israel's involvement with Palestinians. Israel affirms that the schools have facilitated "the access of women to remunerated employment" and have helped to evolve new "ideas and traditions on this issue."<sup>4</sup>

#### Conclusion

In addition to UNRWA and private efforts, Israel government-funded schools have contributed significantly to enlarging and improving educational opportunities for West Bank and Gaza inhabitants. In turn, the advances in education have opened up better employment opportunities.



## HEALTH

The SG Report deals extensively with health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, citing UNRWA's activities almost exclusively and leaving the reader with the mistaken impression that since 1967 conditions have worsened. It makes only passing reference to "inadequate" Israeli improvements in health services. In fact, genuine progress in upgrading health conditions has been achieved since 1967, much of it the result of Israeli efforts. This has been achieved despite the long lead time needed to develop health service infrastructures and the reluctance of many inhabitants to give up their adherence to traditional practices, such as childbirth at home rather than in hospitals.

### Historical Context

Prior to 1967, the level of public health in the West Bank and Gaza was relatively low -- characteristic of a developing region. Malnutrition, infectious diseases and high infant mortality rates prevailed. A poor sewerage system, overcrowding in refugee camps, lack of running water in homes and a concomitantly low level of personal and family hygiene made conditions particularly bad in Gaza. Hospitals, especially in Gaza, were poorly equipped, overcrowded and, as in most developing areas, understaffed.

### Preventive and Curative Services: Israel's Health Care Policy

Israel has undertaken to establish a strong infrastructure to provide comprehensive health services to Gaza and the West Bank. Plans include sustained development of health resources and facilities. Special concern for the needs of women and children, demonstrated by a range of programs to control disease and establish basic sanitation and other primary care services, has guided health care planning.

Underlying Israeli health care policy is the basic principle that local needs are best served by local facilities. A well-equipped and well-staffed local health care system, leading to reduced dependence on regional medical centers is being established. Thus, numerous clinics have been scattered through urban and rural areas. In 1968, for example, there were 89 general medical clinics in the West Bank. Now 148 rural and urban clinics and health centers provide comprehensive primary care and preventive and curative services. Between 1975 and 1982, visits to clinics in the West Bank rose 125 percent, in Gaza by 80 percent.

The Israeli approach contrasts with Jordan's, where good medical facilities are concentrated in large cities like Amman, and services are poor for the nomadic Bedouins. Indeed, Jordan has a higher infant mortality rate as well as fewer hospital beds per 1,000 population than do Gaza and the West Bank.

#### Maternal and Child Health (MCH)

Israel has placed special emphasis on improving maternal and child care. Before 1967 MCH care was very limited. In Gaza where there were only nine centers in the refugee camps, Israel has established 24 new MCH centers, providing a center in every village. Similarly, there has been a fourfold increase in the number of MCH centers in the West Bank (from 23 in 1968 to 95 in 1983) and more than 50 percent increase in general community clinics (from 89 in 1968 to 148 in 1983).<sup>1</sup>

Nutritional aid to pregnant women now includes fetal and infant development. The Israel government provides vitamins A and D and folic iron free of charge to all infants in the area.

Before 1967, over 90 percent of deliveries in Gaza took place at home under the care of traditional birth attendants (dayas) who had no formal training or supervision. In 1970, Israel established a school for midwives in Nablus.

Over the years, partly because of Israeli-sponsored education programs, there has been increasing utilization of hospitals for maternity care. In Gaza the rate of hospital births rose from less than 10 percent in 1967 to 75 percent in 1983. In the West Bank, the rate increased from 13.5 percent in 1968 to 48 percent in 1983. But the practice of using traditional midwives for childbirth is still prevalent in these areas. In mid-1983, to further increase hospital deliveries, Israel lowered hospital charges for noninsured mothers by 50 percent.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to child health care, the SG Report admits that there is insufficient statistical information to permit "an objective evaluation of children's nutritional status." However, it criticizes Israel by implication in citing the allegedly low birth weight of West Bank and Gaza infants. In adducing the statistics that 6.8 percent of West Bank infants and over 5.2 percent of Gaza infants weighed under 2.5 kgm at birth, it does not mention that 10 percent is considered a goal for developing countries and that this has not been achieved even in some developed countries, including parts of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The SG Report cites the Expanded Program of Immunization as an essential element of MCH, and mentions a 1983 World Health Organization (WHO) report that includes the West Bank and Gaza in "areas of control" for six childhood diseases that constitute public health problems in almost all developing countries. Though it refers to

UNRWA's immunization work, it fails to mention the Israel government's contribution to the program.

WHO noted in 1984 during its visit to schools in the West Bank and Gaza that "the general appearance of the children indicates satisfactory nutritional status... Hygiene seems good and the health status of the children seemed satisfactory."

Israel, in October 1984, with funds provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established the Child Development Center in Ramallah to provide care for children with physical or mental development problems. Although not completed by the end of 1984, the Center had over 50 patients. Preparations are under way for centers in Hebron, Nablus and Gaza.

#### Health Facilities and Service Costs

The SG Report (par. 56) comments on an "insufficient number of hospital beds" and "the high cost of hospitalization." To be sure, in certain districts the absolute number of hospital beds has remained constant despite the population increase. The reason is that the population's health has improved. Specifically, the rates of tuberculosis and mental illness have declined. Hospitals formerly used for patients with these diseases have now been converted by Israel to meet current needs. The issue is not the absolute number of beds but rather whether necessary health services are being provided. The general hospital bed ratio (in both government and private hospitals) is 1.4 per 1,000 population in the West Bank and 1.8 - 1.9 per 1,000 in Gaza, surpassing Jordan's ratio of 0.86 per 1,000.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding rising health care costs -- a problem in most countries -- many health services, especially maternal and child health care, are provided free of charge. Partial health care insurance was introduced in the West Bank in 1973 and in Gaza in 1976. In 1978 a new voluntary health insurance plan was introduced to provide West Bank and Gaza inhabitants with comprehensive service in all health care facilities in Israel. Noninsured persons receive care through charitable organizations or private medical services.

As to the SG Report's charge of antiquated equipment, the example of the Shifa hospital in Gaza should be cited. WHO noted the extensive redevelopment of this hospital and stated that it "should constitute a high-technology referral center." Of special interest to women is its large new obstetrics department. Similarly, the Nasser Children's Hospital in Gaza was expanded and renovated in 1978 and the number of its beds increased. Ramallah Hospital, a neonatal care unit, was opened in 1980. Caritas Hospital in Bethlehem, a newly rebuilt voluntary public pediatric hospital, operates a modern, well-equipped special-care unit serving premature babies from the entire region.

### Mental Health

The SG Report infers that occupation has caused a "deterioration of mental well-being and an increase of mental diseases, particularly of neuroses" in the West Bank. The inference is that this results from the "occupation." There is no concrete data to support this claim. The incidence of mental illness in the West Bank and Gaza may be as high as it is in the Middle East generally, an area now undergoing the strains of modernization.<sup>5</sup>

### Training of Health Care Staff

Similarly, the SG Report's charge of insufficient health care professionals in the administered territories is unfounded. Israel has emphasized the training locally of nursing and paramedical staff. Examples of training centers for nurses that are undergoing constant improvement and development are the Shifa Hospital Nursing School in Gaza, opened in 1973 and expanded in 1975, which graduated 576 practical nurses by the end of 1983, and the Ramallah School for Registered Nurses opened in 1971.

Certainly, there could be more health care staff in the territories: the problem is that, because of their training, West Bank and Gaza health personnel are in high demand in Arab countries, particularly the Gulf states; and in pursuit of higher salaries, they emigrate. Even so, the total number of nurses practicing in the territories has more than doubled. In Gaza there were 97 doctors in 1967 and by 1982 there were 242. West Bank statistics show a similar rise.<sup>6</sup> Although the territories have an oversupply of doctors, there is a shortage of specialists there as in Israel.

### Conclusion

Since 1967, the Israeli authorities have provided the West Bank and Gaza with preventive health care systems, upgraded hospital care and advanced training for health workers. The result has been a major reduction in mortality rates and the establishment of a health services system that is superior to those in most developing countries.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

The SG Report states that "insufficient water supply, pollution of the drinking water, [and] low standards of ... sewage and waste disposal" remain some of "the essential problems of environmental health" in the West Bank and Gaza (par. 69). The Report implies that these conditions are a result of the Israeli occupation.

A major factor affecting the health of a population is the availability of adequate supplies of potable water and an environmentally sound sewage and waste disposal system. Deficiencies in these services are endemic to the developing countries. Before 1967, these services were severely lacking in the West Bank and Gaza. In recent years, in cooperation with Arab municipalities, the Israeli administration has improved environmental health services, which the SG Report fails to acknowledge.

### Availability of Potable Water

Advances have been made in developing safe, chlorinated drinking water systems to serve Palestinian urban areas and larger villages. Since 1967, more than 60 West Bank villages have been connected to central water supplies. Potable and safe water, therefore, reaches homes in some 90 of the largest villages in the region. This service is being extended to smaller villages throughout the area.

Israeli water standards have been applied to the West Bank and Gaza. A safe water supply in these areas was achieved in 1978, with bacteriological monitoring and preventive chlorination. Water standards are regularly monitored by district sanitarians in Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>1</sup>

### Sewage and Waste Disposal

Before 1967, sewage collection and disposal systems did not meet the requirements of the local population. The lack of adequate and safe water supplies for agriculture and home use led some local residents to use sewage water for irrigation. This practice could indeed adversely affect the health of the local populations. Since 1970, however, this dangerous practice has been prohibited.<sup>2</sup>

Large-scale development of sewage collection systems and treatment plants for urban areas is under way, requiring significant financial input and implementation time. The sewerage system in Gaza

has been enlarged and new sewage collection systems and treatment plants built to service municipalities and refugee camps throughout the region. Additional sewerage systems are being planned. Routine testing of sewage for vibrio cholera and other enteric bacteria began in 1981.<sup>3</sup> Sewage collection systems in most West Bank urban areas have been extended and reequipped, and sewage treatment plants built in Jenin, Tulkarem, Ramallah, and Hebron. Master planning has been completed for other localities.

Solid waste collection and disposal facilities in the West Bank and Gaza have been expanded and modernized in recent years. During the past 12 years, municipalities with modern equipment have been collecting garbage in most urban areas.<sup>4</sup> In Gaza, additional dumping lots have been opened in areas where contamination of ground water will be avoided, and several localities are processing solid waste into compost for agricultural use.<sup>5</sup>

#### Malaria Control

Strong evidence of improved environmental health conditions after 1967 is the eradication of malaria. WHO declared the West Bank malaria-free in 1970, and malaria control was achieved in Gaza in 1971.

#### Conclusion

Environmental health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza have been improved significantly under the Israeli administration. Sustained large-scale development of water supplies and of sewage and refuse disposal systems will continue to contribute to the improvement of conditions in these territories.

\* \* \*

Obviously, Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza do not enjoy untroubled lives. As this digest has pointed out, these women, like other women in developing as well as developed countries, face many problems. Some may even be exacerbated by living under "occupation" -- even a relatively benign occupation. On the other hand, the SG Report is designed to find fault not fact. It condemns but does not analyze and propose remedial measures. Bringing balance to the discussion of the situation of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, it is hoped, will enable participants at the Nairobi Conference to see that issue in a proper light. The Conference will thus be able better to fulfill its authentic purpose of advancing the equality of women in the years ahead.



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# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/85/4

11 April 1985

THE WORK OF THE VOLUNTARY FUND FOR  
THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN AND  
THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS

ARCHIVES

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

Ms. Margaret Snyder, Chief, Implementation Unit, Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women and Ms. Olubanke-Akerele, Programme Management Officer of the Fund, spoke to NGOs, on 24 January 1985 at United Nations Headquarters, about the nature of the Voluntary Fund's programmes for women in Africa.

Ms. Akerele began the briefing as follows:

At the recently completed General Assembly a declaration on the critical economic situation facing Africa was passed. Within that context the need for emergency food relief as well as the need for long-term solutions to the crisis facing Africa, was identified. The African countries recognized that they are primarily responsible for correcting the imbalances in the societies and in the economic system that has led to the present crisis. At the same time, the role of women in the agricultural and food sector was recognized as being important in the solution of this problem; and a role which requires support -- much more support than has hitherto been forthcoming.

At the same time, it is apparent that the women in Africa have been the primary agricultural labour force, responsible for more than 90% of food production. While the men do the heavy work of clearing the land, the women are responsible for sowing, weeding and harvesting, processing of grains and other critical food stuffs. Extreme emphasis has been placed in African agriculture on cash crop commercial products because of their exchange earnings potential. This has been to the detriment of the food sector which has in fact received very little attention. It is partly because of these imbalances as well as other factors that Africans are unable to feed themselves. Now there is a move toward greater self-sufficiency in food.

President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Chairman of the Organization of African States (OAU), made a statement in October, in Arusha, Tanzania, at the African Regional Preparatory Conference for the Nairobi Conference, on the important role of women in agriculture production in Africa:

" It is not only that women are ignored when decisions are made, they are often neglected, when the techniques of better production or better health are being propagated. Although we know that it is the women of Africa who do most of the work on our peasant farms, most agricultural extension services are directed at the men in the villages. It is the women who use the village water pump most of the time. But the person trained to maintain it is a man . . . "

Ms. Akerele also drew attention to the Voluntary Fund interventions in this very important area. Basically the Fund's Africa Investment Plan emphasizes support for women in the agricultural and food sector; in the area of food strategies. It also emphasizes support in the energy field which is another very important area where women are very heavily involved in Africa. Ms. Akerele highlighted the role that women play as gatherers of firewood, primarily responsible, more than 90% of the time, for the gathering of fuelwood in Africa, for domestic consumption and energy use.

It is the fuelwood situation that is partly responsible for desertification and the disruption of the ecology in Africa which has further aggravated the problem. In Africa, the Voluntary Fund has financed promotion of improved wood-burning stoves, primarily in the Sahel. At the same time, the Voluntary Fund has financed seminars on fuelwood and alternative energy sources in East, West and Southern Africa, in addition to a tree planting programme, in Kenya, called the "green belt". The Voluntary Fund is attempting to address the issues of conservation and environmental control. In addition to this aspect of the African Investment Plan, the Fund is financing participation at the Donor's Round-Table Conferences to insure that consideration of women is taken into account in the programming of mainstream development projects and activities.

Another aspect of the Fund's intervention, highlighted by Ms. Akerele is a project called "Women and Food Systems in Developing Countries: Promotion and Support for Food Cycle Technologies". The basic idea behind this project is the dissemination of tested technologies in the food cycle. The Fund has been very active in disseminating and spreading the use of an improved fish smoker, developed in Ghana, called the "chorkor smoker". This technology has increased the productivity of the fish smoking process; it has also been disseminated in Togo, Benin, Guinea, and recently in Guinea-Bissau. A small practical guide to the improved fish smoker, which has already been utilized in improving ovens in Togo, has been published by the Fund in partnership with UNICEF.

In the fisheries sector, specifically in the development of artisanal fisheries in Africa, women play critical roles. Once the fish are landed on the beaches it is the women who take over and are responsible for the processing, preservation, conservation and marketing. The Voluntary Fund has assisted a project in Benin geared towards further development and improvement of the artisanal fisheries sectors. Its focus had previously been on the fishermen only. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) came in and provided improved hardware and equipment for men to conduct their work. The Voluntary Fund entered the picture by providing the necessary support facilities for the women to have improved processing centres, improved ovens, a revolving loan fund, etc. For the first time there is a situation where women have been recognized and incorporated into a major intervention in the fisheries sector in Africa.

Other food technologies which are to be promoted under this programme are improved grinding mills, improved palm oil presses, and so on . . . This project will be implemented with the assistance of regional technology centres in Africa and in other parts of the world. In view of its present food crisis, this project will first be initiated in Africa.

Ms. Margaret Snyder drew attention to some of the specific actions that are being taken by the Voluntary Fund in conjunction with the NGOs. She stated that media coverage has in large part ignored the food cycle roles of women in Africa and that 1985 is in many ways a unique year for action on this subject. There is a crisis, but for the Fund itself there is the decision (to be effective later this year) made on its long-term future that it will be an autonomous fund in association with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Much of that decision was based on the very thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the work of the Fund, the forward-looking assessment which covered a third of the Fund's investment portfolio. Ms. Snyder added that the Fund will continue to channel about 50% of its resources directly to non-governmental organizations in developing countries. The Fund is especially concerned with supporting women's self-help efforts. Evidence of women's self-help community activities come from Kenya, where an estimated 80% of the self-help work in a number of communities is women's work, a percentage over and above that needed for food production, processing and storage.

Ms. Snyder felt that since the Fund's African Investment Plan and food cycle technologies dissemination package were approved by all the appropriate bodies and were being launched this year, 1985 was an extremely important year for the Fund. This year also marks the end of the Women's Decade with a Conference to be held in July in Nairobi, Kenya. Hence, there is probably no better way to say thank you to the women of Africa who are hosts to women of the world than to increase the investment made by the world's people in the food cycle activities for the long-term support of Africa's self-reliance.



Ms. Snyder pointed to several special activities whereby the Voluntary Fund might be able to co-operate with NGOs. First would be to make known as widely as possible what African women really do in their food cycle activities. The Fund is bringing together data and information on women's activities related to food in Africa, in order to pass it on to NGOs and their affiliates. Ms. Snyder spoke of the need for fora where African women can tell their own story. She said she hoped there could be something like the speaker's bureau with a group of African women who would be able to go to groups around the country to tell the people their own story about their work and the work of their mothers and sisters in relation to food. Ms. Snyder emphasized that in the United States the Voluntary Fund would be working closely with the United States Committee on the United Nations Development Fund for Women in these activities; national committees on the Fund in other countries were also assisting, and all NGO co-operation was welcomed.

Ms. Snyder spoke of the importance of NGOs educating and influencing donor Governments towards insuring that an appropriate proportion of their bilateral support to Africa reaches women farmers, women marketers and so forth, and, also that the Fund, which is the only multilateral development co-operation fund directed to women, would receive more support for its catalytic activities.

In the Voluntary Fund's new association with UNDP a mandate has been introduced to have a greater influence on mainstream development activities financed by the United Nations system. Ms. Snyder stated that, above all, it was monetary resources which provided the clout for these activities. The Government of Norway has already doubled its contribution for 1984 and the money may be especially earmarked for women and food-cycle activities.

Ms. Snyder said that ways needed to be found to raise money and in-kind contributions from private sources. The Voluntary Fund, with its new mandate, can still accept private contributions from individuals, from businesses and from other non-governmental sources. She pointed out that last year NGOs as a group were the seventh largest donors to the Fund. In addition, contributions from private sources can be earmarked as for example: for African women's food technologies. The Fund is producing a paper listing the "costs" of specific technologies, such as, \$1.00 for a tree seedling to plant, \$35.00 for a community fish smoker, \$50.00 for training of village women to participate in a co-operative of repair of a water pump, \$135.00 for a domestic water tank, and so forth.

Ms. Snyder concluded by saying that the Voluntary Fund would welcome any ideas from NGOs, and that the technologies that are provided for women today "are the food for tomorrow".

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/85/8

11 April 1985

### THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

Mr. Noel Brown, Director and Special Assistant to the Executive Director, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), New York Liaison Office, spoke to NGOs at United Nations Headquarters, on 23 February 1985, on the work of the United Nations Environmental Programme.

Mr. Brown began by explaining how UNEP fits within the overall framework of the United Nations. He emphasized that 1985 is an important year for the United Nations, marking the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Organization, International Youth Year, the Year of the Forest, the end of the Women's Decade, the mid-point of the Water Decade and the year in which the African crisis has drawn world attention. Mr. Brown saw 1985 as a year of crisis for the United Nations. He said perhaps never before in its history has the Organization had to face so many challenges and criticisms. He responded to the question posed by some as to whether we have reached the twilight of multilateralism, whether the fabric of international organization and co-operation is not about to become unravelled.

Mr. Brown recognized that in the United Nations itself the mood is one of introspection, as shown by a meeting of its senior management in late January. That meeting, chaired by Mr. Jean Ripert, Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, focussed on the question of the crisis facing the United Nations.

Mr. Brown then addressed the question of the value of the United Nations, stating that a number of nations are questioning their investment in the United Nations and are asking if they are getting value for money. Mr. Brown strongly voiced his own opinion that the United Nations is at present "the best diplomatic bargain going" and in the long term has been an unqualified success. After all, he pointed out, the United Nations has only been operating for 40 years -- a short period in human history.

Mr. Brown said that achievement indicators for the United Nations could be found in the extent to which life and conduct has been internationalized. This is perhaps now the problem, that many see the international system as self-sustaining, a system which only needed the United Nations to spark it into motion, and now requires it no longer.

Mr. Brown stated that during its 40-year existence the United Nations has seen a number of direct and fundamental achievements. Africa has evolved into a continent of independent states, and therefore has a special relationship to the organization. Also, for the first time, the world can boast of a universal state system -- 159 states, some of which came into existence peacefully, some with conflict, but nevertheless always manageable conflict. Mr. Brown pointed out that what the United Nations is attempting to do in terms of the Charter, has never been done before on this scale, that is, to evolve a negotiated world order. There are no models from which to work. Almost all the other major systems of the world have been empires, with an imperial core of power. The United Nations' task is to chart the course of peace through negotiations, and the dream is as valid today as it was 40 years ago. It is still an integral part of the human story with an exciting future ahead.

Mr. Brown then turned to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and highlighted it as one of the major achievements of the 40-year course of the United Nations. The UNEP expresses the "environmental revolution" of the 1960s, whereby man became conscious of his changed relationship with the biosphere. As a result of changes in population, in land occupancy, in wealth, in speed and mobility, in learning, a new world has been created -- a technosphere. But this technosphere, in Mr. Brown's view, has been placed on a collision course with the biosphere. How these two systems are managed is fundamental to human survival, here lies the challenge.

Mr. Brown described how in Stockholm in 1972, the world community placed this issue on the global agenda and challenged governments and the public everywhere to examine their collective responsibilities for the care and maintenance of this small planet that humanity calls its home. This management of the environment cannot be carried out unilaterally or nationally, it is a new global issue which demands a broader basis of co-operation.

Since 1972 the world community has inched its way towards the design and development of a global environmental system. Mr. Brown was impressed by the degree of achievement of the last 13 years in developing a better appreciation of how the earth works. For the first time a holistic vision and total grasp of all the various elements is being developed. Environment has been added to

the roster of fundamental values which most states share. In 13 years it has been recognized as a global value ranking with those of peace, human rights, development and freedom. A global agenda of environmental issues that must be managed has also been sketched.

This environmental agenda includes the management of air resources. Mr. Brown declared that too few people understand that the air is a limited resource. Acid rain is another highly important phenomenon, a product of combustion systems which infect the hydrological cycle with sulphur and nitrogen oxide. Water is another important item on UNEP's agenda, it is being polluted faster than it is being conserved. This is at a time when Africa is in the midst of a drought of unprecedented magnitude. Although the quantity of the earth's water is sufficient for most of the needs of life, it is not equitably distributed. Mr. Brown said the waste of water is appalling. Although water is abundant, it is of fixed total stock, it can be transformed and manipulated, but there is no genius on earth that can create an additional drop.

Mr. Brown said that the Food and Agricultural Organization had designated 1985 as the Year of the Forest. Man is destroying the forests at an alarming rate without fully understanding their value or the carbon nitrogen cycle and the total ecosystem. The forest is being cut down at 50 acres per minute with the minimum level needed to sustain the planet still not known.

Mr. Brown said that what was needed was not necessarily slogans for various years, but quantifiable targets to reduce rates of loss. "Lamentation helps nobody, action is needed". One of the reasons why the world is critical of the United Nations is that it is a process oriented system in a product oriented world. The United Nations is good at managing processes and convening conferences, but the world needs products and concrete achievements.

Mr. Brown then highlighted the problems facing the oceans and the coastal regions of the planet. As far as genetic resources are concerned one species a day is being lost. The planet cannot allow this genetic impoverishment. Mr. Brown also spoke of his concerns regarding industrial safety, recently highlighted by the Bhopal, India, tragedy. Chemical substances are being synthesized at the rate of 1,000 per year, many of which are diffused around the world without a full understanding of their nature. Another result of industrialization in the Third World is the demographic shift to new centres of employment with the consequences that even larger populations are exposed to the possibility of industrial accident.

Mr. Brown then spoke of the response of UNEP to some of these problems. "Operation outreach" has been launched to move beyond the circle of the

converted to other politically and economically relevant groups. He said parliamentarians and legislators need to understand environmental risks and responsibilities and that it is the duty of the United Nations to inform them in this regard. UNEP is now working with the industrial community. In 1984, at Versailles, France, UNEP launched the first conference jointly sponsored by world industry and governments on the question of environmental management. For the first time, the common ground for partnership between the United Nations and industry was investigated. Mr. Brown said that the central challenge facing the United Nations today is development, and that some of the true developers are in industry and those moving the productive forces of the world should be involved to a greater degree. Mr. Brown acknowledged his idea to be a heresy, but added that today's heresy is tomorrow's orthodoxy. Although the United Nations is an instrument of governments, it is not designed exclusively for their use.

The third group which UNEP has been reaching are the development NGOs, through a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 1985. UNEP has also been experimenting with reaching youth. Mr. Brown called this an important task since young people are growing more despondent at the bleakness of the spiritual landscape. He said a way has to be found to give young people a higher sense of purpose. An example is "operation clean up" in Canada where 100,000 young people are joining together to clean up the 3,000 km. St. Lawrence River to mark International Youth Year. Mr. Brown suggested that similar clean up activities of historic rivers might be carried out by youth on a worldwide scale because rivers are lifelines with benefits which are felt by all.

Mr. Brown concluded by emphasizing that despite the apparently bleak future ahead, hope is needed for without hope one is defeated in advance. He said that in the United Nations' 40th Anniversary Year we must take up the challenge, for it is within our power to make the world a safe and secure home for all.

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/85/19  
21 May 1985

WORLD CONFERENCE TO REVIEW AND APPRAISE  
THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN

# ARCHIVES

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

Mrs. Leticia Shahani, Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, spoke to NGOs on 16 May 1985 about the preparations for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women to be held in Nairobi from 15 to 26 July 1985.

Mrs. Shahani began her address by saying that she considered it very timely for all concerned governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as other organizations and institutions, national, regional and international, to concentrate on the preparations for the Nairobi Conference.

During the two years it took to prepare for this global conference, Mrs. Shahani said, the Commission on the Status of Women, which is composed of 32 UN Member States, acted as the Preparatory Body. The resumed third session of the Preparatory Body, which was summoned to complete its preparatory work for the Conference, had just adjourned. The Economic and Social Council has now taken up the report of both the third and the resumed third session to consider the results of these deliberations.

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Looking back to 1975 which was declared International Women's Year by the United Nations, Mrs. Shahani noted that its take-off point was the United Nations conference held in Mexico. For the first time, governments all over the world gathered together to discuss women's issues. That conference adopted a World Plan of Action and called for the period 1976 to 1985 to be proclaimed by the United Nations as the Decade for Women with the objectives of equality, development and peace. This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

Midway through the Decade, in July 1980, another United Nations World Conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, to review progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the first five years of the Decade. In Copenhagen, the importance of the interrelatedness of the three objectives became more apparent. However, Mrs. Shahani noted that a certain divergency of positions exists among Member States over the degree to which these three objectives are interrelated and to what extent global issues of politics and economics affect the lives of women at the national and domestic level. The Copenhagen Conference adopted a Programme of Action for the second half of the Decade.

Mrs. Shahani then referred to the Nairobi Conference which will be convened in July 1985 in order to assess what progress has been made in the advancement of women during the Decade, and also to formulate forward-looking strategies up to the year 2000.

Several questions arise in connection with the Nairobi Conference. Can there be a global strategy for women? Can women of the world adopt a common strategy on which the governments will also agree and which will faithfully and honestly articulate the concerns of women all over the world? Or would it be simpler to adopt regional programmes of action since the issues and concerns of women are different from one region to another? It would be unrealistic, Mrs. Shahani stressed, to expect that the United Nations could come out with an easy and fast answer to all these questions.

Some countries were concerned, Mrs. Shahani said, that the Conference should not become too politicized, but, on the other hand, women in some countries were concerned that the political issues which affect their lives must be properly articulated. For many women in the world, conflicts and war are a daily reality. They cannot even think in terms of delivery of basic primary health care, for instance, if their country is torn by tension and conflict. If we accept that war exists, that women are affected by it, Mrs. Shahani pointed out, then there is a need to consider what can be done to help women in these situations.

On the other hand, Mrs. Shahani went on, this is also a women's conference. In other words, political and economic issues should not be allowed to overwhelm women's issues.

In concluding her presentation, Mrs. Shahani expressed the firm belief that, despite all difficulties, the patience and good will of the delegations at the forthcoming conference would make it possible to go forward on a global basis with women's programmes up to the year 2000.

In response to the question asked by a non-governmental organization's representative if there were any achievements during the Decade, Mrs. Shahani said that this question should be rather addressed to governments. She noted that the basis for the document concerning the review and appraisal of achievements made and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals of the Decade which will go to the Conference come largely from information provided by governments in answer to a questionnaire which was distributed to all of them. In that document one finds many examples of the achievements of the Decade.

She stressed that the very fact that women's issues have become a global issue and governments all over the world are being gathered together to discuss women's concerns is enormous progress.

Answering another question with regard to the organization of work of the Conference, Mrs. Shahani said that in Nairobi, there would be three bodies which would meet simultaneously: a plenary and two committees. The plenary will discuss the review and appraisal of progress made and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals of the Decade. The two committees will discuss the question of forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women up to the year 2000. Committee I will deal with this question at the national level while Committee II will deal with it at regional and international levels. The objective will be to agree on strategies and measures for women's advancement and integration in development to serve as guidelines for action in the period up to the year 2000 by individuals, governments, non-governmental organizations and international organizations.



## DRAFT NAIROBI PROGRAM PLAN

### GOALS

1. To help achieve the objectives of the UN Decade of Women.
2. To oppose politicization of the Nairobi conferences.

### OBJECTIVES

#### A. UN Conference

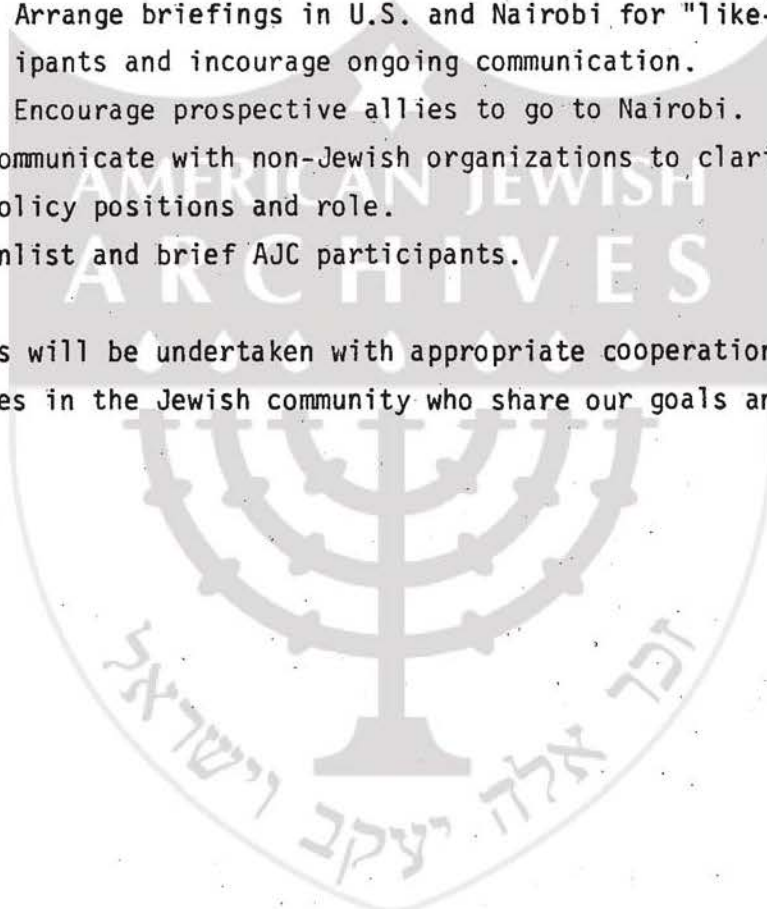
1. Encourage selection of an effective U.S. delegation.
  - a. consult with Reagan administration: President's staff; State Department staff; advisers on women's issues; other influentials (Max Kampelman etc.)
  - b. Recommend candidates for U.S. delegation.
  - c. Offer to conduct briefings and distribute AJC material to delegation.
2. Recommend strategies for U.S. delegation for countering politicization.
3. Advocate maximum U.S. cooperation with friendly nations; establish U.S. commitment to press non-aligned and other amenable states to oppose politicization.
4. Develop ongoing consultation with State Department re:
  - a. Selection of U.S. delegates/
  - b. Plans for U.S. strategy in shaping the agenda.
5. Outreach to the Government of Israel (Seek meetings during Board Institute)
  - a. Encourage selection of strong Israeli delegation
  - b. Seek meeting (Friedman, Elson, Gordis) with the Prime Minister.
  - c. Arrange working meetings in Israel with Nairobi planners.
6. Outreach to foreign governments
  - a. Concentrate on West Germany, France, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica
7. Media outreach
  - a. Briefings for U.S. press covering Nairobi.
  - b. Press kits for media in Nairobi in English and Spanish.
  - c. Conduct press conference analyzing Secretary General's report on status of women in "conquered and occupied" territories.

**B. Non-Government Conference**

Focus: To counteract divisive influences in the Planning Committee and in Nairobi.

1. Identify sympathetic and/or open-minded American organizations and individuals.
  - a. Arrange individual and group meetings to define issues and develop joint strategy, where possible.
  - b. Develop mailing list for distribution of AJC material.
  - c. Arrange briefings in U.S. and Nairobi for "like-minded" participants and encourage ongoing communication.
  - d. Encourage prospective allies to go to Nairobi.
2. Communicate with non-Jewish organizations to clarify AJC concerns, policy positions and role.
3. Enlist and brief AJC participants.

All AJC activities will be undertaken with appropriate cooperation and consultation with other agencies in the Jewish community who share our goals and objectives.



**Jacobo Kovadloff** Director, South American Affairs and Spanish Media

Date: 12-6-84

To: Marc Tannenbaum

---

- For your information
- Thought this would interest you
- For your approval
- As requested
- As promised
- Your comments, please
- Please return
- Let's discuss

Remarks:

[end]

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**WIZO-WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL  
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NOV 30 1984

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**CONFIDENTIAL, NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

Report of Evelyn Sommer's trip to the Havana, Cuba, (Nov. 19-24) Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean in Preparation of the United Nation's Women's Decade Conference to take place in Nairobi, Kenya, July 1985.

**WIZO FEDERATIONS:**

Israel  
Argentina  
Australia  
Austria  
Barbados  
Belgium &  
Luxembourg  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Canada  
Chile  
Colombia  
Congo  
Costa Rica  
Curacao  
Denmark  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Gibraltar  
Great Britain &  
Ireland  
Greece  
Guatemala  
Holland  
Honduras  
Italy  
Japan  
Jamaica  
Kenya  
Mexico  
New Zealand  
Nicaragua  
Norway  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Portugal  
South Africa  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Trinidad  
Uruguay  
Venezuela  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

**1) GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE:**

Principal Agenda items for the governmental conference were:  
a) Review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in pursuing goals and objectives of the UN Decade for Women. b) Concrete measures for overcoming obstacles in attainment of goals and objectives of the Decade. All the members of ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean participated. Associated members from the Netherlands Antilles, Denmark, Philippines and Kenya also participated. Canada, France, Spain and the United States are members. The United States chose not to participate.

Seven international non-governmental organizations attended: International Federation of Democratic Women, International Federation of University Women, International Federation of Family Planning, World Christian Women's Association, Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, Pax Romana and WIZO. The WIZO and the AAPSO were the only non-local representation.

The Conference was chaired by Wilma Espin de Castro (sister in law of Fidel). Vice-Chairmen: Mexico, Ecuador, Guyana and Panama. Rapporteur, Argentina. Besides a strong political statement made by the Foreign Minister of Cuba on opening night, Isidoro Malmierca, and a very anti-United States statement made by the Nicaraguan representative during one of the sessions, the meetings were held without the usual United Nations rhetoric. During all five days not one anti-Zionist or anti-Israel statement was recorded. The meeting was technical and discussions very much to the point.

**2) INTERPRETATION**

The Cubans tried to keep the level of confrontation very low because a) the US was not present, b) there is competition with Mexico, whose representative should have chaired the meeting as Chairman of the Regional Preparatory Conference for Nairobi. This is why Mexico came with a very strong Parliamentary Delegation to this Havana meeting.

B) The atmosphere was highly cooperative and friendly to WIZO. Mr. Enrique Iglesias, Executive Secretary of ECLAC,



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Costa Rica  
Curacao  
Denmark  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Gibraltar  
Great Britain &  
Ireland  
Greece  
Guatemala  
Holland  
Honduras  
Italy  
Japan  
Jamaica  
Kenya  
Mexico  
New Zealand  
Nicaragua  
Norway  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Portugal  
South Africa  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Trinidad  
Uruguay  
Venezuela  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

is an old friend. Mr. Daniel Blanchard, Secretary of IOLAC, asked me to send him privately a list of the people that did not get the Cuban Visa, "because the Cubans claim that they cannot attend IOLAC sessions in some Latin American countries because other governments do not give them visas". Miriam Krawczyk, Secretary of the Women's Division of IOLAC, is also an old friend. Some members in various Delegations were Jewish, i.e. Argentina, Chile and Canada. Others were old friends like the Mexican Parliamentarian, Hilda Anderson.

C) The Representative of AAPSO, a most anti-Zionist organization, came to me and said: "if you don't make a statement, I will not".

D) I am still puzzled by the fact that WIZO, the Women's Int. Zionist Organization was the only NGO that received the visa at the Cuban Desk of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington. In the Convention Hall, Mr. Alarcón, at present a Deputy Foreign Minister of Cuba, came to greet me.

Meetings with Fidel Castro:

I saw him three times. 1) On Opening night, during the reception, I introduced myself as Representative of the Women's Int. Zionist Organization, and Fidel said: "Welcome". 2) On the 4th day of the Conference, Fidel came to a Hall where we surrounded him and he made one of his long speeches about the contribution of women. I approached him and asked "Comandante, what message should I take back to the Zionist women?" He looked at me and asked: "Where do you come from?" I said "The United States", he said: "Send them my most cordial regards". The third opportunity to speak to Fidel was at the reception given by the Cuban Women's Organization where he saw me and said to me: "La hebrea (the Hebrew one)" and then proceeded to speak about the situation of women before and after the revolution, Fidel said: "the history of discrimination against women in Cuba has its roots in the Arab and Spanish tradition. Since the revolution, women have proven that they are superior to men, that they are more disciplined, smarter, better administrators, have the ability to sacrifice themselves more, fight for peace..." After this kind of traditional paternalistic talk, addressed to me, I said: "Comandante, we do not wish to be told that we are better, we just wish to hear that we are equal". He smiled and finished his conversation with me.

3) NON-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE:

A Regional Forum of non-governmental organizations took place from the 17th to the 19th of November. 358 Delegates attended,



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Gibraltar  
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Ireland  
Greece  
Guatemala  
Holland  
Honduras  
Italy  
Japan  
Jamaica  
Kenya  
Mexico  
New Zealand  
Nicaragua  
Norway  
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Paraguay  
Peru  
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Zambia  
Zimbabwe

most of them from leftist and communist organizations. This Forum was convened by CONGO, the Conference of non-governmental organizations with consultative status at the UN and the Federation of Cuban Women. Dame Nita Barrow, who is also the Convener of the NGO Forum for Nairobi, served as Chair of the Forum in Havana. Virginia Sauerwein, Head of the NGO Division of ECOSOC addressed this meeting.

No international NGOs besides the communist ones were invited.

Reports from various sources said that this Forum was a replay of Copenhagen, constant and vicious Anti-American speeches. The final resolutions include a call that January 20, Inauguration Day for the Reagan Administration, should be declared a Latin American and Caribbean Day of Mourning. Other resolutions called for Puerto Rico not to allow American bases in its territory, solidarity with Nicaragua, etc.

I received no information on Anti-Israel or anti-Zionist attacks.

4) GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF CUBA:

There is no question that I did not see the kind of misery that you see in the streets of other Latin American countries. On the other hand, there is great poverty and drabness, especially during a week of storms where the Caribbean sun did not shine. The Hotel, the Riviera, filthy, no hot water, with blackouts every night because "the imperialist forces are coming". The official Radio Rebelde broadcasts the news, first reporting on hunger and poverty in the United States, then gives daily report on United Nations resolutions on Apartheid, etc. and then gives general news like: "A delegation has arrived in Paraguay to hunt for Mengele, the murderer of millions of poles and russians", or they mention "the repulsive figure of Ariel Sharon, who sent Christian Israelis to murder thousands of Palestinians".

Castro made a tragicomic impression on me: The old revolutionary still playing the games of his youth, with the old (and dirty) fatigues, and the same old demagoguery.

4) JEWISH COMMUNITY:

Met with Dr. José Miller, President of Cuban Jewish Community, an Oral Surgeon with good relations with the Government, children and wife are not Jewish. Adela Drorin, Secretary of Jewish Community (whose husband spent 14 years in jail as a political



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Costa Rica  
Curacao  
Denmark  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Gibraltar  
Great Britain &  
Ireland  
Greece  
Guatemala  
Holland  
Honduras  
Italy  
Japan  
Jamaica  
Kenya  
Mexico  
New Zealand  
Nicaragua  
Norway  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Portugal  
South Africa  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Trinidad  
Uruguay  
Venezuela  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

prisoner). Moises Asis, a young intellectual, pro-Castro, who serves as a sort of contact with the government. A. Sklar, works at the Ministry of External Commerce and headed the Cuban Commercial Mission that left on Nov. 25 for China. He expected to remain in China for two months. I also met some neighbors of the Synagogue that made some very strong anti-Castro statements. They were not Jewish and use the Library of the Patronato as a social club.

The meeting took place at the central Synagogue, the Patronato Hebreo de la Havana, an enormous building, with a roof that caved in. The place is desperately in need of repair. They would like to receive the building material to repair the roof.

There are about 1,500 Jews in Havana, but only about 600 are registered with the community, mostly the older ones. Young people do not wish to be identified because they would lose their chances for good employment. There is a full rate of intermarriage, 100%. The only children that come to the Synagogue are the children of the Canadian Embassy's First Secretary, Mr. Strauss, who is Jewish. I also visited two other Synagogues, the Adat Israel, Conservative, where there was not even a Minian and the Centro Hebreo, the Sephardic Congregation, Mr. Jacobo Perez, President, where a group of very old men were praying.

It is most important to maintain contact with them. Due to the many Congresses that take place in Havana, last week there was the Int. Pediatric meeting and the Int. Congress of Photographers, individual Jews visit the Synagogue. What is needed is more official contact with Representatives of official Jewish Organizations. They spoke highly of the visit of Jacobo Kovadloff, of the American Jewish Committee, a few months ago. They would very much like to see the roof of the Patronato repaired.



[end]

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**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

Marc Tanenbaum,

7/17/85

FYI



**From Sidney Liskofsky**

**The Jacob Blaustein Institute  
for the Advancement of Human Rights**

THE JACOB BLAUSTEIN  
INSTITUTE FOR  
THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS

OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

165 EAST 56 STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022 • CABLE WISHCOM, NEW YORK • TEL. PLAZA 1-4000

July 17, 1985

Dr. Mala Tabory  
Rehov Ben Sira 13  
Tel Aviv 62916  
Israel

Dear Mala:

You must have received by now the copies of your Palestinian women study. I hope you find the editing satisfactory.

I am not able for now to respond to your question about Blaustein Institute support for further work on Palestinian women. This will need to await several clarifications, beginning with an assessment of the import of your study in light of the Nairobi experience. Second, we will want to consider whether the subject of Palestinian women, whatever its intrinsic interest, is one which we should include among our ongoing activities, beyond the Nairobi context, or whether we should now put it aside in favor of other, priority subjects.

Third, we will want to remind ourselves that the Nairobi-related Palestinian women question is but one item in a many-faceted and recurrent PLO/Arab/Soviet UN-centered, anti-Israel campaign. For example, allegations of Israeli human rights violations in the routine resolutions of the UN's Human Rights Commission seem to me much more insidious than those in the SG's Nairobi report on Palestinian women. They allege violations not only of the Palestinian "right" to independent statehood or other form of self-determination but also anti-Palestinian discrimination and persecution generally in the territories including Jerusalem.

In light of this broader human rights question, I digress to ask your opinion about the enclosed op-ed column by Davar's Danny Rubinstein in yesterday's New York Times, July 16. It is most disturbing if it depicts accurately the attitudes prevalent among Israeli young people. On the other hand, if he exaggerates or otherwise distorts, then he renders a great disservice to those of us who work hard to protect Israel's image against its detractors in the US, the UN and elsewhere. Reading his column, how does one refute the charge that Israel is a racist society and that its Zionist ideology is racism? One is impelled to ask if the situation in Israel is so hopeless that, despairing of getting a hearing within his own country, in desperation he reaches out via the New York Times for help from the American Jewish community and from the American people generally?

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It could be argued, of course, that such self-critical commentary by an Israeli casts the society in a favorable light and actually helps its image. No doubt this is true in the case of some intelligent and well-intentioned people, but how numerous are these compared to others who hear only the admission of guilt. I would very much appreciate your reaction to this column.

Back to the question of whether we want continued work on Palestinian women: Is it not rather more important to direct attention to the broader question of human rights in the territories, and in Israel proper? In fact, the Blaustein Institute has contributed to this objective in a modest way through its support for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. Might your Israel Yearbook for Human Rights help in its way by addressing more often domestic Israeli human rights questions in addition to international legal subjects?

Finally, as you requested, I sent copies of your edited study to Professor Horowitz at Rutgers University, to Erna Kas in the Netherlands and to Paul Martin. Is there anyone else you would like me to send copies? Can you please also remind me of the persons you have sent copies so that I can update my composite list?

Best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Sidney Liskofsky



SL/DG

# The Irony of Israel's Democracy Project

Ms. P. 1. 1. 1. 1.  
7-16-85

T. 23

By Danny Rubinstein

**JERUSALEM** — The conviction last week of 15 Israeli Jews — three of them for murder and 12 for other violent crimes against Arabs — was deeply upsetting for Israelis. Whatever one thought of the conviction — it was the first time the Israeli judiciary had moved against Jewish terrorists — the episode also fans growing fears that our democracy may be threatened by unstoppable currents of lawless prejudice and brutality.

This summer, the first Israelis born after 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, will be drafted into the Army. Meanwhile, opinion polls indicate that some 42 percent of Israel's youth "agree" or "agree completely" with Rabbi Meir Kahane's racist call for expelling the 1.5 million Arabs in the territories.

Since Rabbi Kahane's election to the Knesset last year, the Israeli establishment has mobilized to counteract his influence with programs to "teach democracy." The state educational system, several private research institutes, public foundations, the army, the Jewish Agency and the Knesset are all involved in this effort. Nevertheless, it appears that Rabbi Kahane's popularity is increasing, particularly among youth.

I myself participated in the campaign, meeting with high school students, soldiers and officers, and my personal impression is that it has almost no chance of success.

In one meeting with Jewish and Arab students, a youth from a kibbutz asked: "Do you think that the Arab citizens of the state of Israel deserve equal rights?" I was completely taken aback and dismissed his question rather brutally: For me, it was

*Danny Rubinstein is on the staff of the Israeli daily newspaper Davar.*

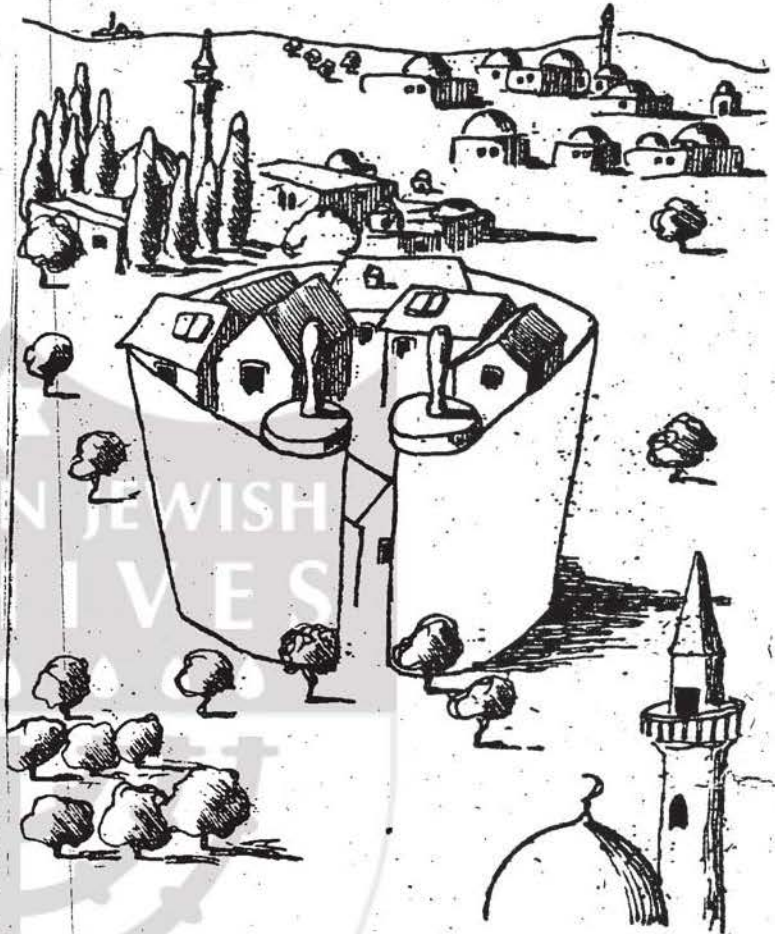
## Treatment of the Arabs teaches the opposite

like asking whether the sun should rise tomorrow morning. What I realized later was that most of the students probably didn't even understand my anger.

The concern for democracy, and for the pernicious influence of Rabbi Kahane, is shared by virtually all political parties and ideological camps in Israel. Bitter rivals have come together proudly in a "consensus," condemning the rabbi and his teachings. In reality, however, nothing has been achieved. What kind of accomplishment is it to reach a national understanding that Nazi-like racism is a bad thing?

The truth is that there is no consensus on the fundamental question facing Israel today: whether we are willing to sacrifice democracy for the sake of holding on to the territories. The national consensus for condemning Rabbi Kahane and teaching democratic values merely allows us to evade this more difficult issue.

Meanwhile, daily life in Israel teaches just the opposite of democratic values. The 1.5 million Arabs in the territories have been living under Israeli occupation for 18 years — living alongside Israelis without sharing their rights. Our young people have grown up believing that nationalist struggle, terrorism and lawful discrimination are facts of life. Under such circumstances, how can one hope to teach democracy?



Mark Podwal

Several years ago, during a crack-down on a stevedore strike, the leader of the striking union appeared on television and criticized the police. "How dare they treat us like this. Are we Arabs from the territories?" He articulated what many of us understand — that it is possible to divide rights

and democracy in Israel today. A dismissed Arab laborer from the territories receives none of the unemployment benefits that his Israeli counterpart gets. Israeli Arabs receive only part of the child allowances that the state pays to Israeli Jews; Arabs from the West Bank and Gaza receive none at all. The same sort of discrimination runs through all aspects of life — justified as a response to Israel's special security situation.

Israelis often defend such discrimination by arguing that Arabs do not serve in the army and that whoever does not fulfill all his duties cannot enjoy all his rights. But few Israelis are willing to draft Arabs, largely out of fear that they would not be loyal to the state. It is a circular, unprovable claim — a vicious Catch-22.

Against this background, what is the point of preaching equality and democracy? Without some basic change in relations between Arabs and Jews, what can we Israelis expect but more terror, more fanatical undergrounds and more Meir Kahanes? Against this background, the campaign to teach democracy is no more than a bad joke. □

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**date** June 28, 1985  
**to** Area Directors  
**from** Sonya F. Kaufer  
**subject**

MEMORANDUM

The AJC will have the largest delegation at the non-governmental Forum marking the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. As you know, there is concern that this meeting, like two earlier ones connected with the Women's Decade, will be politicized for anti-Israel propaganda purposes. The attached op-ed calls attention to that danger.

Thanks for all the clips that have been coming in.

Regards.

sfk/dr  
att.  
85-965-31



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sonya', is written over a faint circular seal of the American Jewish Committee. The seal features a menorah and Hebrew text.

# THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE **VIEWPOINT**

INFORMATION AND OPINION TO PONDER AND SHARE  
PUBLICATIONS SERVICE SONYA KAUFER, Director

## KEEPING NAIROBI ON COURSE

The United Nations Decade for Women, launched in 1975, will conclude in July 1985 with an international conference in Nairobi, Kenya. Let's hope this conference fares better than the two earlier ones in 1975 and 1980, when representatives from Arab and Communist-bloc countries ignored women's issues and used the meetings to push through political resolutions attacking Zionism, applauding the Sandanistas in Nicaragua, and praising Marxist anti-government guerillas in Morocco.

The UN provides ample opportunity for debate on political matters: the General Assembly and the Security Council exist for just this purpose. Turning specialized conferences into political battlefields sabotages the intent of the meetings and contributes to the serious credibility problem plaguing the world organization.

There is no shortage of women's problems clamoring for the attention of the delegates at Nairobi: discrimination in employment and education, domestic violence, involuntary prostitution, and a host of other pressing issues. It would be a shame to bury these subjects under a welter of unrelated subjects injected for political advantage alone.

The United States delegation to the Nairobi Conference is determined to work with the representatives of all countries concerned with women's rights to keep the meeting on course. If this effort fails, the UN's image as a forum for constructive dialogue will be further tarnished. But the real losers will be women the world over.



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NEW YORK... "The Governments of the United States and Western Europe have insisted that the UN Nairobi conference avoid divisive political issues more appropriately addressed in the UN's political bodies; unfortunately, Arab and Soviet bloc governments seem intent on injecting into Nairobi the issue of Palestinian Women, singling it out for special attention despite the many truly problematic situations women face in many parts of the world," according to Richard Maass, chairman of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

In anticipation of this possible manipulation of July's Nairobi meeting, Mr. Maass announced the publication of a book-length study on Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, written by Dr. Mala Tabory, a legal scholar and social scientist.

The study, according to Sidney Liskofsky, Program Director of the Institute, challenges assertions made in the UN Secretariat's Report on Palestinian Women, the background document for discussion of this issue at Nairobi.

"The UN Report," Mr. Liskofsky said, "unfairly criticizes Israel, and assumes Israel is always to blame for unsatisfactory conditions, real or imagined." The UN Report, he noted, "admits that it is not the product of original or independent research. It relies on prior UN documents, which themselves reflect anti-Israel bias." Mr. Liskofsky also pointed out that previous UN Women's Conferences in Mexico City and Copenhagen became forums for attacking Israel and for equating Zionism with racism.

Using a wide variety of sources, including extensive interviews with women in the West Bank and Gaza, the JBI study found that:

\* Since 1967, infant mortality in the West Bank and Gaza has dropped by 50%, leaving it 400% lower than Saudi Arabia's infant death rate.

\* Life expectancy in the occupied territories has jumped from 40 to 62 years under Israeli rule, placing residents there ahead of Jordanians, Egyptians, Syrians and residents of other Arab countries;

-more-

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\* Palestinian workers, men and women, are free to join the Israeli union Histadrut, and a total of 31 unions operate openly in the West Bank and 7 in Gaza.

\* Illiteracy among women in the West Bank dropped by 26% and in Gaza by 28% since 1967, putting these women ahead of women in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

\* Health services and conditions have undergone extensive improvement in the past 18 years, and the West Bank and Gaza have been freed of malaria.

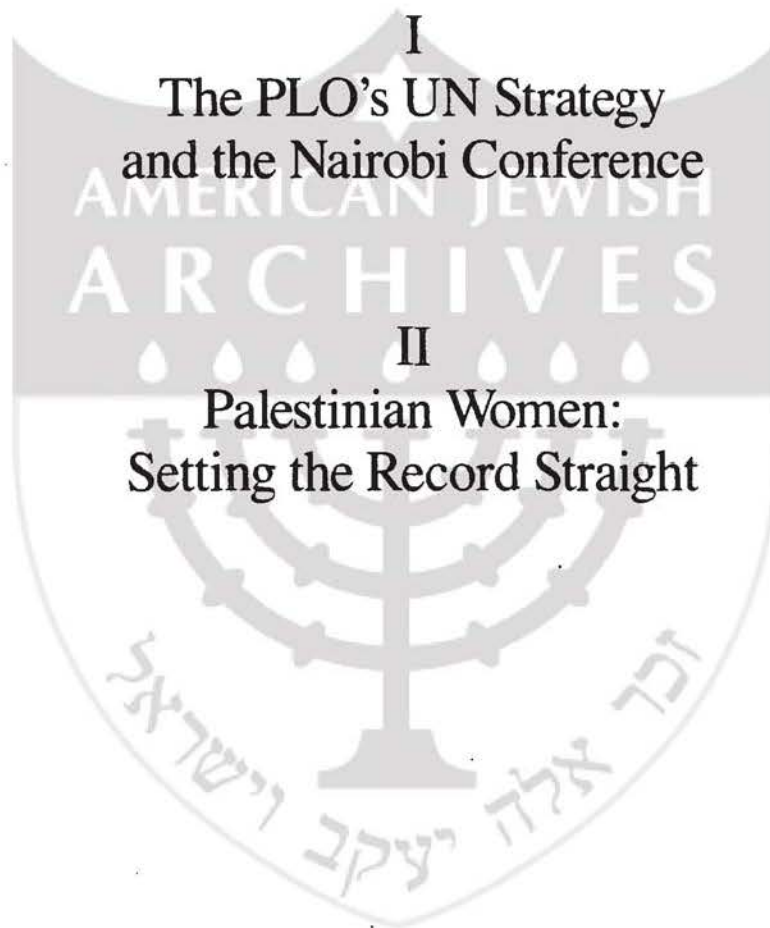
An abbreviated version of the study is being distributed by the American Jewish Committee for the information of participants in the Nairobi conference. Copies are available by contacting Morton Yarmon, Director of Public Relations, American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Founded in 1972 to honor the memory of Jacob Blaustein, a leading human rights advocate, the Jacob Blaustein Institute aims to further understanding of human rights and to help translate human rights principles into practice.

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THE JACOB BLAUSTEIN INSTITUTE  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS



I  
The PLO's UN Strategy  
and the Nairobi Conference

II  
Palestinian Women:  
Setting the Record Straight

## PREFACE

Following the 1967 war, the PLO and its Arab and Soviet allies developed a grand strategy for using the UN to challenge Israel's legitimacy and to promote the Palestinian goal of independent statehood. Among the UN programs targeted for this purpose was that of women's rights including the world conferences to promote it held in Mexico City in 1975 and in Copenhagen in 1980, and planned to be held in Nairobi in July 1985 to mark the conclusion of the UN Decade for Women.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda of the Nairobi conference, "The Situation of Women and Children Living in the Occupied Arab Territories and Other Occupied Territories," is documented by a Report of the UN Secretary-General (SG) (A/Conf. 116/6), henceforth SG Report, which attacks both the fact of Israel's occupation and its specific policies affecting Palestinian women in the territories. Using this Report as point of departure, the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights commissioned an independent in-depth study of the situation of Palestinian women and children. Pending publication, the Institute has prepared brief digests of some preliminary findings of the study, together with an introduction describing the PLO's UN strategy overall and specifically its targeting of the UN women's rights programs.

The digests, like the study, are presented under these main headings: demography and vital statistics; employment; working conditions; education, including vocational training; health; and environmental sanitation. Source references in the text are provided in abbreviated form; full bibliographic information may be found at the end of this entire document.

Thanks are due to Kenneth Bandler, Allan Kagedan and Phyllis Sherman for helping prepare the digests.

Sidney Liskofsky  
Program Director

## THE ARAB/PLO UN STRATEGY AND THE NAIROBI CONFERENCE

Beginning in 1948, but especially following the PLO's establishment in 1964 and Israel's victories in the 1967 and 1973 wars, the UN has come to play a central role in the political warfare of the PLO and its Arab and Soviet allies. This warfare has aimed at delegitimizing Israel's statehood while legitimizing Palestinian claims. The PLO owes its paper and propaganda successes in the UN to the voting majorities it could command based on the UN Charter's one nation-one vote rule, and a block system that developed with the entry into UN membership in the 1960's and 1970's of a large number of newly independent African and Asian states.

The numerous Arab and Muslim members of these blocs and the manipulative talents of their Cuban and other Soviet-oriented members guaranteed PLO ascendancy. The blocs' determinative role is indicated by the size of their membership: Developing Nations group - 120 ("Group of 77"); Non-Aligned Movement - 99; African group - 50; Islamic group - 41; Arab group - 21; Asian group - 39. Though divided on some issues (e.g., Afghanistan), these groups could be counted on, as could the 11-member East European group, to overwhelm any resistance from members of the divided Latin American, the West European and other (including US), and the Nordic groups, numbering 33, 22, and 5 respectively.

Its assured voting majority enabled the PLO to achieve harsh and repetitive resolutions. These condemned Israel's policies, practices and Zionist ideology; demanded that Israel evacuate its captured territories; endorsed the idea of an independent Palestinian state, and called on governments and nongovernmental groups the world over to join in the PLO's "struggle." The resolutions emanated from the Security Council, General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and its subordinate bodies as well as from UNESCO, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other specialized agencies and from UN-sponsored conferences and seminars. Speeches and formal resolutions calculated to produce political and even legal consequences equated Zionism with nazism, fascism, colonialism, apartheid and racism, terming it an evil to be eliminated. Israel was charged with international crimes -- genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity -- and with being a "non-peace loving state" (a legal concept intended to provide a basis for applying the mandatory sanctions provisions of the Charter's Article VII). Demands (so far unsuccessful) are regularly made to expel Israel or exclude it from the UN or from certain of its specialized agencies.

Many of the resolutions of condemnation have purported to be based on the findings of UN investigative bodies mandated to examine charges of Israeli wrongs against Palestinian people in matters of education, culture, labor and health, among others. Yet, the inquiries themselves have been conducted on terms which assumed the truth of the very charges they were to investigate. When on occasion the investigators cleared Israel of the charges, the executive body of sponsoring agency (eg, World Health Organization) disregarded the findings.

In November 1974, the General Assembly granted the PLO, though not a member state, with the right to participate in all UN meetings and conferences. The following November, it established a Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories. In December 1977, the General Assembly established, within the UN Secretariat, a Palestine Unit, subsequently promoted to Division and finally to Centre, to service this Committee. Both are closely linked to the PLO.

#### UN Decade For Women

Very early PLO propagandists recognized the promise of the international women's rights movement for its anti-Israel diplomacy. They were eager to take advantage of the movement's increasingly influential constituency in the US and other Western democracies. In December 1972, the General Assembly declared 1975 as International Women's Year, and called for the convening of a world conference in Mexico City for July 1975. The 1975 conference was to launch a UN Decade of further activity aimed at improving the status of women worldwide in law and in fact.

The PLO strategy proved itself in the Declaration and the Plan of Action for 1975-80, adopted at Mexico City. The Declaration called upon the international community to join in seeking to eliminate Zionism together with colonialism, foreign occupation, apartheid, and racial discrimination, and it appealed for moral and material support for the Palestinian women's struggle. It laid the groundwork for the adoption by the General Assembly, on November 10, 1975, of the libelous resolution equating Zionism with racism. By connecting Zionism to apartheid it sought and succeeded to a degree in erecting an anti-Israel ideological barrier in the minds of Africans and Blacks generally.

In July 1980 in Copenhagen, midway in the Women's Decade, at a second world conference on women's rights, the PLO recapitulated its Mexico City success. Here again, a Declaration and Program of Action were adopted as guide for the Decade's second half, 1980-85. The unabashedly politicized Copenhagen conference reaffirmed, explicitly or by implication, the Mexico City affirmations and recommendations,

including the Zionism-racism equation and the call to funnel assistance to Palestinian women through the PLO. It also called for repudiation of the Camp David Accords.

The Copenhagen conference recommended that another world conference of governments be held at the Decade's end, in July 1985. Eventually, the decision was made to hold this conference in Nairobi, Kenya, during July 15-26 and prior to and overlapping it, during July 8-17, to facilitate the holding of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) Forum, as is customary at specialized conferences under UN auspices. The Forum, expected to draw several thousand women from every region and political system, will be the site of unofficial exhibits, workshops and seminars dealing with the gamut of women's issues.

The Commission on the Status of Women, a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, was mandated to serve as preparatory body to develop the substantive agenda, rules of procedure and background documentation for the Nairobi official conference. With increased US and other Western resistance to politicization of the UN's technical agencies and conferences -- that is, the injection into them of issues extraneous to their essential purposes and the deciding of the issues by automatic majorities on political grounds rather than on the merits -- the Commission failed during three sessions, the last in March 1985, to agree on key questions of agenda and procedure. The US and other Western states pressed for deletion from the provisional agenda of political questions more properly debated and acted upon -- amply indeed in the case of the Palestinian question -- by the General Assembly and other political bodies. These states also sought to have issues decided by consensus rather than by predictable voting majorities. What the results of these efforts will be is uncertain. It is likely, however, that the conference will be held and political matters, including the Palestinian question, will loom large in its deliberations.

#### The Nairobi Agenda and Documentation

The Palestinian women question is expected to be raised under the provisional agenda. Item 7, entitled "Critical Review and Appraisal of Progress Achieved...on the Basis of appropriate Documentation from the Mexico City and Copenhagen International Conferences," clearly invites attention to the resolutions of Palestinian women and other controversial resolutions of prior conferences.

In its introduction, the SG Report (A/Conf. 116/6), prepared as official background document for considering this agenda item, states: "as no comprehensive study related to the status of Palestinian women has been prepared within the United Nations system during the last year, it draws exclusively on recent reports and other material dealing with various aspects of living conditions of Palestinian people in the Arab occupied territories, prepared by United Nations bodies." It adds (in a footnote): "Although none of these reports refers specifically to the question of Palestinian women, they

describe the living conditions of the Palestinian population as a whole." Elsewhere in the Report it is stated: "The policy of the occupying power uniformly affects men, women and children as members of society." With reference to curfews, security checks and other alleged "oppressive practices" by the military authorities, it observes that they "affect equally all members of the family."

These statements suggest that the PLO propagandists, realizing the weakness of the case regarding Palestinian women, were unwilling or unable to prepare a particularized study of the subject. Instead, the Report rehashes PLO criticism of Israel's occupation. From this, the reader is supposed to conclude, without specific proof, that Israel's occupation is especially injurious to Palestinian women and children.

Though SG Report actually does include a number of purported "facts" explicitly related to women and children, these "facts," even when not presented as accusations, are nevertheless accusatory in tone and effect. Examples are the statements concerning the low participation of Gaza women in the total labor force and the illegal employment and low wages paid West Bank working women in Israel, implying that Israel is to blame, when, in fact, other factors are at fault.

Unintentionally, what the SG Report does reveal is the magnitude of the PLO's success in coopting the UN system. The report recounts the material and humanitarian support the PLO (or Palestinians) receives from the UN system overall. Observing that "the resolution of the Palestinian problem remains one of the main international political issues for the numerous organs and divisions of the UN and the specialized agencies in the political, social, economic and humanitarian spheres," the report cites among others UNRWA's education programs; the UNICEF's health and other programs for mothers and children; the WHO's health services; the projects of the UN Development Program for promoting pre-primary, technical, vocational and higher education; the ILO's projects designed to promote vocational training; and the study of the Economic Commission of Western Asia on food security in the occupied territories and the assistance provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Even where the Report has a semblance of specificity, it is replete with unsupported and biased assertions. Not only does it not compare the purported current situations with pre-1967 conditions, but it takes no account of the constraints imposed by Arab/Muslim religious traditions and societal norms on the advancement of Palestinian women.

In summary, the SG Report (on agenda item 7) is little more than a collection of shop-worn charges, a typical UN indictment of the Israeli occupation. Wherever justice may lie in the tragic Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the report fails to depict accurately the situation of Palestinian women and children in the Occupied Territories.

Provisional agenda item 3, (entitled "Forward-Looking Strategies of Implementation for the Advancement of Women and Concrete Measures to Overcome Obstacles to the Advancement of Women and Concrete Measures to Overcome Obstacles to the Achievement of the Goals and Objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women") provides yet other opportunities for anti-Israel political warfare. An example is sub-item "Q" in the SG Report (A/Conf. 116/PC/21) prepared as official basis for considering this agenda item. Sub-item "Q" offers an opening for discussing Palestinian women under the generic rubric "Refugees and Displaced Women." Since PLO condemnations of Israel are rarely rejected on grounds of redundancy, this opening is not likely to be bypassed.





## DEMOGRAPHY AND VITAL STATISTICS

Sections of the SG Report concerning the demography and vital statistics of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza are filled with inaccurate information and statistics, and, therefore, are misleading. Readers are given the impression that the Israeli occupation has caused a high percentage of the local inhabitants to remain in refugee camps and a significant number of males to emigrate. These implications do not stand up under scrutiny. Additionally, the SG Report fails to acknowledge the significant advancements made during the period of the Israeli administration in health care, which has contributed to a decline in infant mortality and an increase in life expectancy, leading to a remarkably rapid population growth rate in the West Bank and Gaza.

The SG Report admits that "it is difficult to know exactly how many Palestinians there are altogether." (para. 10). Estimates published by Arab countries and by the PLO, and even by UNRWA, have been found to be exaggerated, reflecting the political tendency to over-emphasize the "refugee problem." In fact, with the exception of the West Bank and Gaza, no formal census of the Palestinian populations in Middle East countries has been conducted.

### Population in Refugee Camps

The SG Report asserts that some 50 percent of the West Bank population and 85 percent of those living in Gaza are refugees registered with UNRWA. (para. 10). It bases these figures on 1983 UNRWA refugee registration lists and Israeli government statistics for total population published in 1981. Since UNRWA admits that it has often exaggerated the refugee figures, and Israeli government figures for 1982 and 1983 were not taken into account, it is not surprising to find the statistics on refugees as a percentage of the total population grossly inflated.

By 1983, according to Israeli census figures, there were no more than 105,000 refugees living in the West Bank (65,000 in camps) and 205,000 in Gaza (175,000 in camps). (16-Year Survey, p. 55). These figures show that only 14 percent of the West Bank population and 42 percent of the Gazan population are refugees, in contrast to the SG Report's figures of 50 and 85 percent, respectively.

UNRWA, nevertheless, claims that there were 350,779 registered refugees in the West Bank (90,905 in camps) and 410,745 in the Gaza Strip (226,937 in camps) as of June 1984. (UNRWA CG Report 1983-84, Table 2, p. 50). UNRWA has a vested interest in perpetuating the problem that justifies its own existence, and the SG Report advances this interest. As observed, UNRWA itself has stated that the registration figures "do not necessarily represent the actual population of

Palestine refugees in their places of registration; the refugees move and do not always inform the Agency; they also die without their families informing the Agency." (UNRWA CG Report 1978-79, p. 1, para. 2).

Before 1967, population growth on the West Bank and Gaza was relatively static, despite high birth rates, due to high infant and other mortality and to extensive emigrations. Since that time there has been rapid population growth resulting from the continued high birth rates due to improved health and economic conditions along with a decline in net outmigration. Thus, the Gaza Palestinian population has increased from 364,000 in 1969 to 476,000 in 1982, and the West Bank Palestinian population grew from 164,000 in 1967 to 747,500 in 1982.

#### Infant Mortality

With the extension of health services under the Israeli administration, infant mortality in the West Bank and Gaza was reduced by more than 50 percent during the period 1967-1982. (Health 1984, p. 9). The reported infant mortality rate in 1982 in the West Bank was 25.6 per 1,000 live births, and in Gaza 41.3 per 1,000 live births. (Ibid. p. 11). These figures compare favorably with available data on infant mortality rates (aged 0-1 year) for 1981 in neighboring Arab countries. For example, the rate of infant deaths per 1,000 live births in Jordan was 68; in Egypt 80; in Syria 61; and in Saudi Arabia 112. (World Population Data Sheet). The infant mortality rate in Israel was 13.9 per 1,000 live births. (Ibid.).

The significant decline in infant mortality in the West Bank and Gaza is due to a number of factors, among them extensive development and utilization of health services, including well-distributed primary health care units and visits by public health staff to remote villages, availability of health insurance, the increasing demand of the population for health care, and UNRWA supervision of refugee camp populations. The increased utilization of health services is exemplified by the fact that births are increasingly taking place in hospitals and medical centers. In 1984, 45 percent of Palestinian births in the West Bank and 75 percent of such births in Gaza took place in such facilities.

#### Child Mortality

During 1981-1983 child mortality rates for ages 0-5 were relatively low, averaging 7 per 1,000 in the West Bank and 10.3 in Gaza. In countries with very poor health conditions, according to the World Health Organization, the under 5 mortality rate exceeds 100 per 1,000; in highly developed countries it is as low as 2 per 1,000. (WHO 1981 Development of indicators for monitoring progress towards health for all by the year 2000, pp. 68-69; cited in Health 1984, p. A111).

### Life Expectancy

Improvements in medical services and health conditions has resulted in remarkable extension of life expectancy. In 1967, life expectancy at birth was estimated to be 48 years in the West Bank and Gaza. In the mid-1970s it was estimated at 55 years, and in the early 1980s at 62 years. Again, this compares favorably with neighboring countries, where life expectancy at birth for the early 1980s is estimated to be 61 in Jordan, 56 in Egypt, 66 in Syria, and 55 in Saudi Arabia. In Israel the figure is 74.

### Emigration

The SG Report states that "the high male emigration rate" from the West Bank and Gaza "has created a ratio of 80 males to 100 females." Not only are these figures inaccurate, but the SG Report fails to provide any explanation for the "emigration," leaving the impression that the fault is Israel's. The fact is that in 1983, there were 996 males per 1000 females in the West Bank and 991 males per 1000 females in the Gaza area. These are extraordinarily high ratios.

Inter-state migration for economic reasons is common throughout the world. In the Middle East, workers have migrated from the more densely populated, labor-surplus countries to the Arab oil-producing countries along the Persian Gulf. Due to their educational level and technical training, workers from the West Bank and Gaza have been in demand by states with extensive resources but short of trained manpower. In 1982, there were some 400,000 Palestinians in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. They constituted some 40 percent of the total work force in Kuwait alone.

During 1982 and 1983, reported net outmigration from the West Bank and Gaza declined significantly from previous years, due to improved economic opportunities and socio-economic conditions in these territories, as well as to newly imposed immigration restrictions by Arab countries, precipitated by the drop in oil prices and declining revenues of the Arab oil exporting countries (Health 1984, p. 12, A8, A83).

### Female Heads of Household

The SG Report, citing UNRWA statistics for 1983, states that "on the West Bank there were 27,226 female heads of household out of a total of 72,272 and in the Gaza Strip 14,567 out of a total of 75,296." Leaving aside the question of accuracy of UNRWA's figures, it is instructive to note that "Roughly 25-33% of all households in the world are *de facto* headed by women, with the percentage much higher in certain countries and regions...The rising incidence of female-headed households in rural areas of developing countries results from impoverishment and migration." (Ahmad and Loufti, pp. 3, 4, and 5).

According to the UNRWA figures, roughly 38 percent of all West Bank households and 19 percent of all Gazan households are headed by women, which compares favorably with the developing world.

The SG Report's implications that the Israeli occupation has caused a high percentage of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to reside in refugee camps, the traditional family structure to be disrupted by male emigration and an increase in female-headed households are easily refuted by the facts. Economic factors, not political, are largely responsible for the rise or decline in patterns of migration and the increasing incidence of households headed by women. The fact is that, during the period of the Israeli administration, the Palestinian population has undergone rapid growth, resulting from significant improvements in economic and health conditions that markedly reduced infant and child mortality rates and increased life expectancy. These achievements, which are not elucidated in the SG Report, deserve, at the minimum, acknowledgement by the UN.



## EMPLOYMENT

In discussing employment among Palestinian women, the SG Report cites critically, in a contradictory and misleading fashion, both unemployment and employment among these women. It charges that, in general, economic conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have declined since 1967 (para. 32). It notes (para. 33) that Palestinian women living in these areas are underrepresented in the work force. At the same time, it holds Israel responsible for the purported harm to family life, children and social traditions (para. 40) resulting from the large number of Palestinian women who work outside the home.

Any assessment of the economic health of the administered territories must take into account the areas' past. Before 1967, Jordan neglected the West Bank in favor of the East Bank of the Jordan River. High employment depressed economic life in both the West Bank and Gaza. In 1967, economic conditions began to improve. Unemployment declined, wages rose, the labor force grew and the economy expanded. Analysts point out that a "high rate of overall growth" (ILO, 1978) occurred during the decade 1967-77 and that "Israeli occupation... opened up employment opportunities outside the (Arab) village on a scale unprecedented..." (Journal of Palestine Studies, 1981 no. 1). Income from employment in Israel increased West Bank purchasing power and this led, in turn, to local economic improvement (Labor 1983). Speaking on a strictly economic basis, it is indisputable that the Israeli administration has had a favorable impact on the West Bank and Gaza.

### Labor Force Participation

To be sure, as the SG Report implies, the level of Palestinian women's labor force participation is low; but the participation level of Arab women in general is lower. This is a result of high fertility, low literacy, and traditional restriction of women to domestic roles. (Arab Labour Office Report, 1984, pp. 15-16). Indeed, the Palestinian women's labor force participation compares favorably with Arab women elsewhere. Thus, according to the SG Report, the participation rate for women is West Bank, 18.7%, and Gaza, 6.1%; the figure for Egypt is 5.7%, United Arab Emirates 5.8% and Yemen 5.6%. (ILO, 1983).

### Traditional Position

Curiously, after pointing out the alleged absence of employment opportunities for Palestinian women, the SG Report complains that these same women, presumably responding to employment opportunities, are being uprooted "from their traditional position in society." The

Report's authors are so intent on criticizing all aspects of life under Israeli rule, they appear to be unaware that they are making contradictory claims.

It is valid, of course, to explore how women's employment may affect a traditional culture, weighing this against how it can help women to gain respect and self-dignity. The complex question of the needs of women as individuals as against the demands of family and the community is hardly restricted to Palestinian women; it affects women in all modern and modernizing societies. This is not an issue of Israeli policy, which seeks neither to encourage nor dissuade Palestinian women from working, for the very reason that Israel wishes to avoid accusations that it is imposing its values and destroying Arab traditions. Rather the positive or negative aspects of women's employment is a question of values within Arab culture and other cultures. Briefly, Arab girls are expected to work for a few years until they bear children - and their young marrying age inhibits the acquisition of job skills. Thus, Arab, including Palestinian, women are limited to working at unskilled occupations. Once married, traditional mores inhibit them from working outside the home (Escribano, p. 155).

The SG Report states that the absence of Palestinian working women "from the house has adverse effects on the family and community life, on the education of children and on the preservation of tradition." This is one view. Another perspective comes from a Palestinian woman writer, who speaks of how working in Israeli companies has "enhanced (Palestinian women's) self-worth..." and how this "feeling of dignity... undermines the old pattern of male domination and female submissiveness..." (Tawil, 1979, pp. 128-129)

In sum, Palestinian women in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, are better off than women in other Arab countries with regard to employment. Israel has not forced Palestinian women to work; rather it has opened new job opportunities for those women who choose, of their own accord, to seek employment.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

It would be difficult to find ideal working conditions anywhere. Unfortunately, in many countries, women's working conditions are poorer than men's. The SG Report, in treating this issue, presents a distorted picture of the working conditions of Palestinian women, portraying them as "exploited," poorly paid workers who often work illegally and receive no health or other benefits (para. 39).

The Report's treatment of this subject evokes several questions: Is this an accurate picture of all or most Palestinian women? If some are "exploited," why is this so? Is it a result of Israeli policy, as the SG Report implies, or is it the consequence of self-imposed restrictions stemming from the Palestinian women's [own political convictions or personal choices?]

The SG Report mentions three categories of Palestinian working women, and blurs the distinctions between them. These are: women employed legally in Israel; women employed legally in the West Bank and Gaza; and women working illegally in Israel. Each category merits separate consideration.

### Legal Employment in Israel

As regards Palestinian women employed legally in Israel, the SG Report conveniently fails to mention a key institution in their lives: the Union. Historically, trade unions in many countries have served as agents for improved working conditions. Israel's Histadrut union, encompassing 90% of the country's workers, is one of the world's strongest because its membership comprises such a high percentage of the labor force. It actively encourages Palestinian men and women who work in Israel to join its ranks. This is not only because the Histadrut has always opposed discrimination, but also because the non-unionized worker threatens the wage levels of the unionized workers. Those Palestinians who belong to the Histadrut have fully equal benefits with fellow members, including severance pay, work accident insurance, vacation pay, sick pay, child allowances, clothing allowances, a spouse allowance, religious holiday pay, access to health services and medical insurance. (Labour 1983, p. 14) These men and women are not "exploited" in any sense.

Many Palestinian men and women who work in Israel choose not to join the Histadrut. The reason is political: they do not wish to be seen cooperating with Israel (ILO Report, 1984). Nonetheless, even these workers benefit from any collective agreement reached by the Histadrut covering the enterprise where they work.

What is the result of this equal treatment of Palestinian women working legally in Israeli factories? According to Raymonda Tawil, a Palestinian writer, equality has increased the women's "self-esteem... Many of these women told me that working in Israeli factories gave them a new sense of self-worth." (Tawil, pp. 128-29).

#### Legal Employment in the West Bank and Gaza

What of Palestinian women who work in the West Bank and Gaza? The Histadrut's collective agreements could apply to them only if Israel annexed the territories, which neither Israel, nor the Palestinians, desire. Nevertheless, the Israeli authorities permit free union activity in the territories and as of 1985, there are 31 unions in the West Bank and 7 in Gaza.

It is not surprising that a small percentage of West Bank and Gaza workers, as compared with Israeli workers, are unionized. The local economies have been and remain largely agricultural, and therefore unreceptive to unionization. Nonetheless, the Israeli administration in the territories has taken actions to improve local working conditions including some intended to assist women in particular. It has regulated work hours, protected the right to not work at night, banned women's employment in dangerous occupations, and increased post-natal leave from 21-45 days.

#### Illegal Employment in Israel

The third category of Palestinian working women are those who choose to work illegally in Israel. What motivates this choice? The same reason that people in many countries prefer to work "off the books": tax avoidance. More specifically, these Palestinian women, unsure of how to enter the labor market, unwilling to undertake "steady jobs," and wishing guidance and protection, fall prey to the "Rais," an illegal labor recruiter who deprives them of a high percentage of their wages, and hires them out to hotels, restaurants and agricultural enterprises. The Israeli Government seeks to stem the tide of illegal workers and has no interest in perpetuating such tax evasion. The Histadrut actively tries to persuade illegals to work legally and to join the union as illegals drive down all workers' wages.

The SG Report notes that Palestinian women generally fulfill roles on the lower level of pay scales. This is true -- but so do women in many countries, as anyone familiar with the condition of women internationally knows. In Canada, for instance, women typically earn between 50-60% of men's earnings. The reasons for this pay gap include lower education levels, less job experience, less technical knowledge, and shorter stays in the labor force. Low wages do not mean that the Canadian Government exploits Canadian women or that the Israeli Government exploits Palestinian women.



Perhaps the best illustration of the progress in employment made by Palestinian women working in the West Bank and Gaza are the numerous women working in management and teaching roles: In the West Bank, there are 363 female school directors, 6,475 teachers, and 655 health service workers. These women are not only benefiting personally from the experience gained in these occupations, they are assisting members of their community to live productive lives (Israel, 1985).

While the Palestinian women share some of the problems that women face in many developed and developing countries, by any measure, their working conditions have improved greatly since 1967.



## EDUCATION

Education provides the foundation for future employment and for citizen participation in cultural and public life. In its discussion of education from the pre-school to the vocational training levels, that is provided by UNWRA as well as by private Arab institutions, the SG Report seeks to persuade the reader that harassment of students and teachers is the only Israeli Government contribution to the education of Palestinians. No evidence is given to support the harassment charge, which, in any case, is a matter of civil rights, rather than of Israeli policy and practice. Whatever one's position on the civil rights issue, the SG Report does not discuss at all the question of education, much less give an account of Israeli contributions to education in the West Bank and Gaza, outlined below.

### Literacy

Literacy is the basis for all further education. In the West Bank and Gaza, the rate of illiteracy has declined since 1967, placing residents of these regions ahead of other Arab countries. From 1970-1984, the percentage of illiterate women declined in the West Bank from 65% to 36% and in Gaza, from 65% to 36%. In Arab countries, the number of illiterate women is higher: Algeria (1982) 68%, Egypt (1976) 77%, Jordan (1979) 49%, Saudi Arabia (1980) 87%, Syria (1975) 76%. (Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1984).

Paralleling the rise in literacy is the increase in the number of students at all educational levels. The student population of the West Bank and Gaza overall grew by 104% between 1967 and 1985 while the school-aged population increased by only 28%. The number of girls aged 5-18 in school increased by 125.3%, reflecting a jump in attendance at all three school levels: elementary, and junior high (both compulsory) and high school (which is voluntary).

In higher education, five universities have been established in the administered territories since 1967. Similarly the number of women students doubled (2599 to 4680) from 1980-85 in teachers' seminaries, agricultural, technical and paramedical colleges.

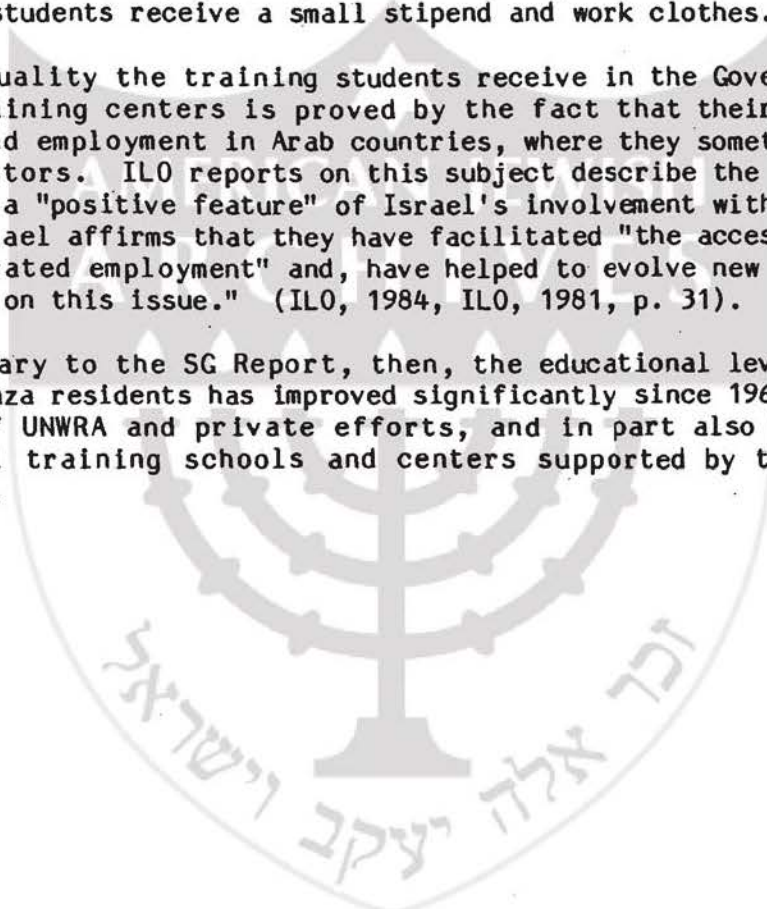
Whatever scattered instances of unrest may have occurred, clearly, there has been an improvement in educational facilities for West Bank and Gaza residents. This improvement was achieved in part through UNWRA and private efforts discussed in the SG Report, but also through government-funded schools.

### Vocational Schools

Since 1968, Israeli government-supported vocational schools have trained 55,000 West Bank and Gaza young women and men. Today, there are twenty-three of these schools, eighteen in the West Bank and five in Gaza. The Government also funds nine vocational training centers, where women learn more "traditional" skills, such as sewing, knitting and weaving, useful at home as well as in the workplace, and newer skills such as teaching driving. Thus far, 10,000 women have enrolled in these courses, 7,000 from the West Bank and 3,000 from Gaza. These lessons, which are publicized in the media, are free of charge and attending students receive a small stipend and work clothes.

The quality the training students receive in the Government-financed training centers is proved by the fact that their graduates easily find employment in Arab countries, where they sometimes serve as instructors. ILO reports on this subject describe the vocational schools as a "positive feature" of Israel's involvement with Palestinians. Israel affirms that they have facilitated "the access of women to remunerated employment" and, have helped to evolve new "ideas and traditions on this issue." (ILO, 1984, ILO, 1981, p. 31).

Contrary to the SG Report, then, the educational level of West Bank and Gaza residents has improved significantly since 1967, in part because of UNWRA and private efforts, and in part also because of vocational training schools and centers supported by the Israeli Government.



## HEALTH

The SG Report deals extensively with health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, citing UNRWA's activities almost exclusively and leaving the reader with the erroneous impression that since 1967 conditions have worsened. It makes only passing reference to improvements in health services made by Israel which it contends have been "inadequate." Because health care can mean the difference between life and death, the distortions are particularly serious -- and misleading. In fact, genuine progress in upgrading health conditions has been achieved since 1967, much of this the result of conscientious efforts by Israel -- efforts which are ongoing. This is despite the long lead time needed to develop health service infrastructures and the reluctance of many inhabitants to give up their traditional adherence to practices which hinder use of advances in medical services, e.g., child bearing at home rather than in hospitals.

It is important to place the health question in an historical context. Prior to 1967, the level of public health in the West Bank and Gaza was relatively low -- characteristic of an underdeveloped region. Malnutrition and infectious diseases prevailed along with high infant mortality rates. This was particularly true in Gaza due to poor sewage systems, overcrowding in refugee camps, lack of running water in homes and a concomitantly low level of personal and family hygiene. Hospitals, especially in Gaza, were poorly equipped and overcrowded and, as in most developing areas, there were too few doctors. Some examples of what Israel has done since 1967 to upgrade health conditions in the West Bank follow.

### Preventive and Curative Services: Israel's Health Care Policy

Israel considers the provision of health care to all, regardless of social class, as a fundamental right of the entire population. (WHO, 1984). Israel has undertaken to establish a strong infrastructure providing comprehensive health service systems to the Gaza and West Bank, including plans for continued development and improvement of health resources and facilities. Special concern for the needs of women and children has guided health care planning, as is demonstrated by a range of programs to control disease and to establish basic sanitation and other primary care services.

The underlying principle of Israeli health care policy is that the basic needs of the local population are best served by local facilities in close proximity to the population rather than through large showplace regional facilities. Gradually a well-equipped and well-staffed local health system is being established, leading to reduced dependence on regional medical "centers." Thus, numerous clinics have been scattered through urban and rural areas. As an example, in 1968 there were 89 general medical clinics on the West

Bank. These have been expanded to 148 rural and urban clinics and health centers which provide a comprehensive network of primary care and preventive and curative services. Between 1975 and 1982, visits to clinics in the West Bank rose 125%, in Gaza by 80%.

The Israeli approach contrasts with Jordan's system where, for example, in Amman there is a good medical school and good medical facilities but medical services are not evenly balanced throughout the country. Services for the Bedouins in the countryside are scant. Comparison of health care statistics show that Jordan has a higher infant mortality rate as well as fewer hospital beds per population than does the Gaza and West Bank.

#### Maternal and Child Care (MCH)

Israel has placed highest priority on improving maternal and child care. Before 1967 MCH care was very limited. In Gaza there were no MCH centers other than the nine UNRWA centers. Since 1980, 24 MCH centers have been established by Israel in addition to the UNRWA centers operating in the refugee camps. There has been a fourfold increase in the number of MCH centers in the West Bank (23 in 1968 to 95 in 1983) and almost a 50% increase in general community clinics (89 in 1968 to 148 in 1983).

Nutritional aid to pregnant women has been expanded to include fetal and infant development. The Israel Government provides vitamins A & D and folic iron free of charge to all infants in the area, a service the Government does not give to its citizens in Israel itself.

Before 1967, in Gaza over 90% of deliveries took place at home under the care of traditional birth attendants (dayas) who had no formal training or supervision. In 1970 Israel established a new school for midwives in Nablus, helping to improve standards of treatment.

Over the years, there has been increasing utilization of hospitals for maternity care, due to encouragement by the Israel Government, mainly through education programs. In Gaza the rate of hospital births rose from less than 10% in 1967 to 75% in 1983. On the West Bank, the rate increased from 13.5% in 1968 to 48% in 1983. But the practice of using traditional midwives for childbirth is still prevalent in Gaza and the West Bank. In mid-1983, in order to further increase hospital delivery, Israel lowered hospital charges for non-insured mothers by 50%.

With regard to health care for children, the SG Report admits that there is insufficient statistical information to permit "an objective evaluation of children's nutritional status." However, it criticizes Israel by implication in citing the allegedly low birth weight in West Bank and Gaza infants. In adducing the statistics that

6.8% of West Bank infants, and over 5% of Gaza infants, weighed under 2,500 grams at birth, it does not mention that 10% is considered a goal for developing countries and that this has not been achieved even in some developed countries, including parts of the United States.

The SG Report cites the Expanded Program of Immunization as an essential element of MCH, mentioning in this connection a 1983 WHO Report which includes the West Bank and Gaza in "areas of control" for six childhood diseases that constitute public health problems in almost all developing countries. Though it refers to UNWRA work in immunization, it fails to mention the Israel Government's contribution to the program.

WHO noted in 1984 during its visit to schools in the West Bank and Gaza schools that "the general appearance of the children indicates satisfactory nutritional status . . . Hygiene seems good and the health status of the children seemed satisfactory."

Care for children with physical or mental developmental problems was augmented when the Child Development Center in Ramallah was established by Israel in October 1984 with funds provided by UNICEF. Although it is not completed, the Center had over 50 patients by the end of 1984. Preparations by Israel are under way for three more centers in Hebron, Nablus and Gaza.

#### Health Facilities and Service Costs

The SG Report (para. 56) complains of an "insufficient number of hospital beds" and of "the high cost of hospitalization." To be sure, in certain districts, the absolute number of hospital beds has remained constant though the population has increased. The reason is that the population's health has improved. Specifically, the rate of tuberculosis and of mental illness has declined. Therefore, the hospitals formerly used for patients with these diseases have now been converted by Israel to meet current needs of the population. The issue is not the absolute number of beds, but rather whether necessary health services are being provided. The general hospital bed ratio (in both government and private hospitals) is 1.4 per 1000 population in the West Bank and 1.8 - 1.9 per 1000 in Gaza, surpassing Jordan's ratio at 0.86 per 1000 (Health 1984, p. 16, A4, A24, A102).

Regarding rising health care costs -- a problem in most countries -- many health services, especially maternal and child health care, are provided free of charge by Israel. partial health care insurance was introduced in the West Bank in 1973 and in Gaza in 1976. In 1978 a new health insurance plan was introduced on a voluntary basis to provide West Bank and Gaza inhabitants with comprehensive service in all health care facilities in Israel. Non-insured persons receive inexpensive medical care through charitable organizations or private medical services.

As to the SG Report's false charge of antiquated equipment, the example of the Shifa hospital in Gaza should be cited. WHO noted the extensive redevelopment of this hospital and stated that it "should constitute a high-technology referral center" -- of special interest to women is its large new obstetrics department. Similarly, the Nasser Children's Hospital in Gaza was expanded and renovated in 1978 and its number of beds increased. The Ramallah Hospital, a neonatal care unit, was opened in 1980. Caritas Hospital in Bethlehem, a newly rebuilt voluntary public pediatric hospital, operates a modern, well-equipped special-care unit serving premature babies from the entire region.

#### Mental Health

The assertion of the SG Report that there has been a "deterioration of mental well-being and an increase of mental diseases, particularly of neuroses" in the West Bank is totally spurious. The inference is that this results from the "occupation." Quite simply, there is no concrete data to support this claim. The incidence of mental illness in the West Bank and Gaza may be as "high" as it is in the Middle East generally, an area now undergoing the strains of modernization (Health, 1984, p. 24).

#### Training of Health Care Staff

Similarly misleading is the SG Report's charge of insufficient health care professionals in the administered territories. Israel has emphasized the training locally of nursing and paramedical staff. Examples of training centers for nurses which are undergoing a process of constant improvement and development are the Shifa Hospital Nursing School in Gaza, opened in 1973 and expanded in 1975, which graduated 576 practical nurses by the end of 1983, and the Ramallah School for Registered Nurses opened in 1971.

Certainly, there could be more health care staff in the territories: the problem is that, because of their training, West Bank and Gaza health personnel are in high demand in other Arab countries, particularly the Gulf states. In pursuit of higher salaries, they emigrate. Even so, the total number of nurses practicing in the territories has more than doubled. In Gaza there were 97 doctors in 1967, and by 1982 there were 242. The West Bank statistics show a similar rise. Although there are more general doctors than can be absorbed in the territories, there is a shortage of specialists, as there is indeed in Israel as well.

### Conclusion

As pointed out here, since the beginning of the occupation, the Israeli authorities have established in the West Bank and Gaza preventive care systems, upgraded hospital care and advanced training of health manpower. The result has been a major reduction in mortality rates and a health services pattern that is already above the level in most developing countries. The SG Report, however, fails to note this genuine progress.

Doubtless, further improvements are needed. The Ministry of Health of Israel in its 1984 Report devotes much attention to a series of new recommendations in this regard which it plans to implement, even in the face of its severe budgetary crisis.





## ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

The SG Report states that "insufficient water supply, pollution of the drinking water, [and] low standards of ...sewage and waste disposal" remain some of "the essential problems of environmental health" in the West Bank and Gaza (para. 69). The report implies that these conditions would not exist but for the Israeli occupation. A comprehensive examination of environmental health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza shows that the purported facts included in the SG Report are not true, and the suggestion that Israel is at fault is incorrect.

A major factor affecting the health of a population is the availability of adequate supplies of potable water and an environmentally sound sewage and waste disposal system. Deficiencies in these services are endemic to the developing countries. Improvements in these fields are, therefore, significant.

Before 1967, these services were severely lacking in the West Bank and Gaza. In recent years, however, in cooperation with Arab municipalities, the Israeli administration, has achieved major progress in environmental health services. The SG Report fails to acknowledge these achievements.

### Availability Potable Water

Advances have been made in developing safe, chlorinated drinking water systems reaching Palestinian urban areas and larger villages. Since 1967, more than 60 West Bank villages have been connected to central water supplies. Potable and safe water, therefore, reaches the communities and homes of some 90 of the largest villages in the region. This service is being extended to smaller villages throughout the area.

Israeli standards of testing drinking water safety have been applied to the West Bank and Gaza. Safety of water supply in these areas was achieved in 1978, with bacteriological monitoring and preventive chlorination. Water standards are regularly monitored by district sanitarians in Gaza and the West Bank. (Health 1984, p. A58, A136).

### Sewage and Waste Disposal

Before 1967, proper sewage collection and disposal systems were limited and did not meet the requirements of the local population. Due to the lack of adequate and safe water supplies for agriculture and home use, some local residents used sewage water for irrigation. This practice could indeed adversely affect the health of the local

populations. Since 1970, however, this dangerous practice has been halted, and laws prohibiting the use of sewage water for agriculture are strictly enforced (Health 1984, pp. A59-60).

Large-scale development of sewage collection systems and treatment plants for urban areas is underway, requiring significant financial input and implementing time. The sewage system in Gaza has been enlarged and new sewage collection systems and treatment plants built to service municipalities and refugee camps throughout the region. Additional sewage systems are being planned. Routine testing of sewage for *Vibrio Cholera* and other enteric bacteria began in 1981. (Health 1984, p. A60, A59). Sewage collection systems in most West Bank urban areas have been extended and re-equipped, and sewage treatment plants built in Jenin, Tulkarem, Ramallah, and Hebron. Master planning has been completed for other localities.

Solid waste collection and disposal facilities in the West Bank and Gaza have been expanded and modernized in recent years. Whereas refuse disposal along roadsides in the West Bank was once commonplace, garbage collection in most urban areas during the past 12 years has been carried out by municipalities with modern equipment (Health 1984, p. A138). In Gaza, additional dumping lots have been opened in areas where contamination of ground water can be avoided. In addition, several localities are processing solid waste into compost for agricultural use (Health 1984, p. A59).

#### Malaria Control

A strong indication that environmental health conditions improved after 1967 is the eradication of malaria. The WHO declared the West Bank malaria-free in 1970, and malaria control was achieved in Gaza in 1971.

The SG Report, without citing sources for its generalized statements regarding the availability of clean water and of adequate sewage and waste disposal systems, has seriously distorted the reality of environmental health conditions in Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza. Significant achievements have been made in this area during the period of the Israeli administration. Sustained large-scale development of water supplies and of sewage and refuse collection will continue to contribute to the improvement of environmental health conditions in the territories.

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N.Y. TIMES JUNE 19, 1985

# Women Hope for a Civil Nairobi Forum

**O**RGANIZERS of and participants in an international forum on women's issues next month in Nairobi, Kenya, expressed their hopes yesterday that the meeting would be free of the heated political confrontations that have marked two previous gatherings.

At a news conference, Dame Nita Barrow of Barbados, who is convening the forum, said she hoped that the more than 9,000 women and men who are expected to attend "will not only talk at each other but listen as well." The nongovernmental meeting is scheduled for July 8 to 20 and will overlap an official United Nations conference in Nairobi that starts July 15 to mark the end of the International Decade for Women. The forum will provide an opportunity for women to meet and exchange views more informally than at the later conference.

The ghosts of past gatherings were much in evidence at the news conference, held at the headquarters of the American Jewish Committee and attended by representatives of that organization and the National Council of Churches as well as Dame Nita. The representatives said they hoped that political issues, particularly the status of Palestinian women, would not cloud the proceedings.

The Palestinian issue and denunciations of Israel dominated the conference in Copenhagen in 1980 and led to bitter confrontations between delegates. Since then, Mimi Alperin of the A.J.C. said, there have been contacts between the American Jewish groups and Palestinian women's groups.

Still, forum participants said, events in the Middle East are likely to be discussed. "People are going with different agendas," said Mrs. Alperin, who will help lead a delegation from the American Jewish Committee. She, too, expressed the hope that delegates would avoid "the empty and destructive rhetoric that overshadowed more positive accomplishments" at past meetings.

The forum, which will include 10 days of workshops and exhibits, will have no structured agenda except for a "very, very strong emphasis on networking," or making contacts, she said. "What we offer them is an opportunity to explore issues together and to exchange ideas. We hope they will disagree in a manner that allows a discussion and does not close doors."

"It may be a very big dream to hope for that," Dame Nita said, "but we have a trust in women."

Dame Nita said organizers had taken steps to avoid confrontations and encourage discussion

among individuals. Experts in conflict resolution will be on call and the forum will include what she described as a "peace center, so that if women want to discuss something, it will not be an army descending to meet another army."

She stressed that the forum would be different from the official United Nations conference, where delegates take the positions of their governments.

"We don't make resolutions, we do not put forward statements," Dame Nita emphasized. "In the forum, women are coming to talk about what they themselves have done and how it's impacted on their lives."

Americans will make up almost a third of the forum participants, which will include delegates from more than 150 nations. Many professions and socioeconomic groups will be represented, including welfare mothers from Canada and village women from Africa.

The gathering will offer participants what Dame Nita called a smorgasbord of activities. In addition to more than a thousand discussion workshops on such issues as sexual equality, economic development and world peace, there will be creative arts displays, technology exhibits, a film festival and possibly field trips to nearby rural areas.