

Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund
Newsletter
March 2009



Palestinian women protest in East Jerusalem against Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Women's education is more important than ever

Israel's 22-day offensive against Gaza during December 2008 and January 2009 killed 1380 Palestinians, 431 of whom were children. This devastating military attack has left a humanitarian catastrophe with 20,000 Palestinian people homeless and large numbers injured, disabled and traumatised.

Given the scale of destruction, we questioned whether we - the Sheffield Palestine Scholarship Fund organising group - should re-direct our efforts and raise funds to help with the humanitarian crisis. However, Mona el Farra, the Scholarship Fund's partner, has been staunch in urging us to continue the work we are doing. *'The universities are beginning to open again,'* she told us in February 2009. *'You have a commitment to the women you are supporting. And it is not only that. We have to look at the long term. Women's education and women's empowerment is now more important than ever. With all that has happened, families are going to be more likely to send their sons to university, not their daughters. Women must be part of re-building Gaza. They are critical to the developing Palestinian society.'*

Schools and universities badly hit

Education has suffered significantly. Large numbers of schools, colleges and universities have been destroyed or damaged. Some were deliberately targeted. University lecturers, teachers, students, school pupils have been killed or injured.

- An air missile hit Gaza Training College in Gaza city killing 8 students and wounding a further 19.
- The Islamic University of Gaza was deliberately targeted. The Israeli military claimed that the science labs were used by Hamas for the 'research and

development' of weapons, but no evidence has been produced. All the science labs and engineering labs were destroyed in the raid and the library and adjacent buildings badly damaged. Three of the Sheffield Palestine Scholarship Fund's students attend the Islamic University.



Islamic University, Gaza

- The Gaza Music School, established by the Qattan Foundation with co-funding from the Swedish government, was completely destroyed in the bombing.
- The Agricultural School in Beit Hanoun was badly damaged when 4 artillery shells landed nearby. 3 passers-by were injured.

Getting schools and universities up and running again is now a major priority in Gaza. Education is key to the future of Palestine and a major form of resistance to Israeli occupation. In universities classes are being held in any room that is usable, even if the rest of the building is in ruins. Despite historical splits, the three universities in Gaza are working together and have sent messages of thanks to organisations and individuals abroad who showed solidarity over the Israeli bombardment, for example through student occupations.



A schoolgirl tells Al Jazeera journalists how she hid under her desk when fighting broke out near her school.

International outrage

Following the end of fighting, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon visited the Gaza Strip. He called the Israeli attacks 'outrageous' and demanded guarantees that it would never happen again. After visiting the U.N. headquarters hit by Israel, he called for those responsible to be held accountable: 'I am just appalled. I am not able to describe how I am feeling. This was an outrageous and totally unacceptable attack against the United Nations'. The president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, described Israel's Gaza offensive as a 'genocide' against the Palestinian people.

On January 12, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution in which it strongly condemned the ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza, saying it had 'resulted in massive violations of human rights of the Palestinian people'. The resolution demanded 'the occupying power, Israel, to immediately withdraw its military forces from Gaza.'

The World Health Organization called for the removal of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, warning that the present situation will result in 'preventable deaths'.

Scholarships

Encouraged by our partners in Gaza, we are currently supporting 8 young women to access higher education in Gaza. This is a much larger number of scholarships than we ever dreamed possible and is thanks to the incredible generosity and commitment of you, our supporters. What is also very exciting is that the Sheffield Palestine Scholarship Fund has encouraged other international organisations to fund similar scholarships. Our partners in Gaza are now working with funders from Norway and the USA and are administering an overall Scholarship Fund that this year is supporting 70 young Palestinians to access higher education in Gaza. Each internationally-supported student receives the same - \$600 a year - irrespective of which organisation is funding the scholarship. The Sheffield Fund alone exclusively benefits women. In the academic year 2008/9 we are supporting:

- **Huweida Khadr Subeika**; from Rafah refugee camp, studying at Al Aqsa University
- **Sama Wadi**; from Jabalia refugee camp, studying basic education at the Science and Technology University
- **Sabha Alhour**; from Al Bureij refugee camp, studying English
- **Khluod Thawabta**; from Nusseirat refugee camp, studying engineering at the Islamic University
- **Subah AbuSultan**; from Al Bureij refugee camp, studying at Al Aqsa university
- **Maisa AbuKhadr**; from Nusseirat refugee camp, studying English at the Islamic University
- **Mai AbdulRahman**; from Jabalia refugee camp, studying English at the Islamic University.
- **Susanne AbuKhadr**, studying basic education at the Islamic University.

How does the Scholarship Fund work?



Meeting of the Sheffield Scholarship Fund Organising Group at Blue Moon Cafe

The Fund is managed in Sheffield by a small coalition of women working in partnership with the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and in Gaza by a panel drawn from the Board of Directors of the Red Crescent Society and the Union of Health Work Committees.

Candidates for scholarships are nominated by their local community centre and are either ready to enter university or are in the first or second year of a course but unable to continue for financial reasons. There are strict selection criteria for the Scholarship Fund, which include the candidate's socio-economic background, commitment to doing voluntary work for the community, and personal and family circumstances such as a recent home demolition, or war injuries.

Our supporters make donations or monthly contributions through a standing order, and/or by organising or taking part in fundraising events. Any contribution is much appreciated, but standing orders are particularly welcome. As a more predictable source of income, they enable us to estimate our income more accurately and to plan.

Going beyond individual scholarships

If – during an academic year - we raise more money than is required to cover the scholarships we have committed to, we seek guidance from our partners in Gaza about what else we can fund that will further the education of women. We are currently supporting two projects:

Transport Fund – the inability to pay for transport can be a real barrier to girls attending school. Secondary school girls often have to walk four kilometres to school and four home. The transport fund enables girls and women to reach their place of education more easily and safely.

Women's Empowerment Project. Working with women from the more deprived areas of the Gaza Strip – villages and towns as well as refugee camps – this project has, for example, been active in the Zeitoun area of Jabalia, which saw ferocious bombing during the recent Israeli offensive. Forty-nine people from one family alone died and several other families were bombed out of their homes. With characteristic courage and as an act of defiance against the Israeli aggression, the rebuilding work is now underway in Zeitoun and so is the Women's Empowerment project.



The project works with women aged 20-40 who have not gone beyond secondary school education. It runs activities around dental care, food and hygiene, and health education and there are opportunities for the women to get together and exchange experiences. The programme is taught by qualified staff including nutritionists, who teach the women how to provide adequate nutrition on a limited income. This is important as many Palestinians depend upon food aid and anaemia is prevalent in children. The project provides food parcels to the women and encourages them to take an interest in both human and women's rights and to be active in the community. Run through the Union of Health Work Committees, a non-governmental organisation, the project adapts to the circumstances and needs of the women it works with. To help the children to overcome the traumas of war, there is also a plan to include play and play therapy as part of the training programme.



A BIG thank you

Support for the Fund is growing steadily. We now have a monthly income of £252 from standing orders. This is a fantastic position for the Fund to be in. So far there has been no impact on standing orders as a result of the recession.

Thank you to everyone who contributes through a regular standing order.

As well as standing orders, our supporters are brilliant at doing a whole range of fundraising events for the Fund. Special thanks over the last year go to:

- June and to Ros, and their friends and families, for their donations in lieu of presents at birthday and retirement celebrations.
- Jenny who held a wonderfully imaginative 'Clear out your wardrobes' fundraiser.
- Hilary and Bev who both held delicious fundraising dinners .
- Hackney Unison branch who made a donation to the Fund.
- Jo, Melinda, Jude and Hils who took part in the Sunderland 10 K women's' run.
- Claudia for designing a beautiful card for the Fund (see page 6).
- Other individuals who gave donations.

Last, but by no means least, we have been given a donation of £1,262 from Sheffield Women's Forum. The Forum, which has recently wound up its activities, selected the Scholarship Fund to receive some of its outstanding funds. We are hugely grateful – and appreciate the Forum recognising the work of the Scholarship Fund in this way.

Thank you to everyone who has donated money or set up a standing order!

Please continue your support.



A pupil at UNRWA's (United Nations Relief & Works Agency) Beit Lahia school on the 24th January 2009, the first day UNRWA schools re-opened after the Israeli bombardment.

Much will be healed and helped if there is some justice here. Without that the physical scars on the bodies and buildings here may be patched up but the deeper psychological ones will remain without the healing salve of some restorative justice. The picture is as it says – the American School in Gaza was targeted by the Israeli Army probably with munitions from the USA. What an education are we giving here?

S.Robins, constructive plastic surgeon working in Gaza, quoted from Mona el Farra's blog on 30th January 2009. See www.fromgaza.blogspot.com



A cropped version of this photograph was used to make cards which we sold at the end of last year as a fundraiser for the Scholarship Fund. Many people admired this stunning piece of ceramic artwork and wanted to know more about it. Claudia, who took the photograph, tells us all that she can: 'I was working in the house of a woman artist and saw this wonderful piece of ceramic art. I asked the woman about it. All she could tell me was that she'd bought it in Wales some thirty years before from the woman who had made it. It had once been broken, but had been successfully mended'.

HOW TO CONTACT US

You can contact the Scholarship Fund on sheffieldpwsf@yahoo.co.uk or by writing to SPWSF, 124 Cliffe Road, Sheffield S8 9DN. You can also check out the Scholarship Fund on the Sheffield PSC website: www.sheffieldpsc.org.uk

If you wish to take out a standing order with your bank, our bank details are:
Co-op Bank, account name: Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund
Sort code 08-92-99
Account number 65236686.

Please contact us if you do take out a standing order.