Blessed are those who risk, for they shall be offered safety.
Blessed are those who refuse to violate women, for they have chosen life.
Blessed are those who recognise and value the unique talents of others, for they shall succeed.
Blessed are those who raise their voices for health justice, they shall be heard.
Blessed are those who build community, for they will be blessed with belonging.
Blessed are those who dare to change, for they shall be blessed with the future.

(From the Week of Prayer focusing on: 'Women Creating a Safe World')
CONTENTS

ENHANCING LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
FOR YOUNG WOMEN TO BECOME ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE
UNCSW, Feb–March 2011

YOUNG WOMEN, EDUCATION AND THE UN RESOLUTION 1325:
REFLECTIONS FROM A YOUNG WOMAN MEMBER
Maylena David, YWCA of Jerusalem

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM
Daisy Rumman, Executive Director, YWCA of Ramallah

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND MOTHERS:
THE SILENT TERRORS OF BIRTH IN JERUSALEM
Hanan Rafidi Kamar, Executive Director, YWCA of Jerusalem

“NONVIOLENCE IS A WEAPON OF THE STRONG”:
THE YWCA OF INDIA’S RESPONSE TO THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE
Leila Passah, National General Secretary, YWCA of India

I LEFT A PIECE OF MYSELF IN PALESTINE
Leanne Baumung, Hawaii, USA

BROCHURE CONTENTS
WOMEN CREATING A SAFE WORLD:
27TH WORLD YWCA COUNCIL AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S SUMMIT
Reflections from the YWCA of Palestine

Cover Photo: The YWCA of Palestine Delegation in Zurich, Switzerland – July 2011
Reflections
“A Journey of Inter-generational Leadership at the YWCA”

Right at the outset of the World Council Meeting in Zurich, and as we lined up alphabetically and by country delegation to go into the official opening session of the plenary, I remembered vividly the first World YWCA council meeting that I attended when I was still a youth member, in Singapore in 1983. At the time, we were affiliated to the World YWCA movement as part of the YWCA of Jordan, and I still remember very well the struggle we had to go through to make our sisters understand our political situation, and why we were part of the Jordan delegation, and how we came to be under Israeli Occupation, and the implications this occupation has on the women and children. We had to spend long and relentless hours to draft the Middle East Resolution on Peace and Justice, and to get the region to start with to agree to it, and then the whole World Movement to endorse. One of the most impressive encounters for me was to witness the charismatic leadership of Dame Nita Barrow, the World President from Barbados, who I have a good memory of to this date. Dame Nita Barrow was not young at the time, but she was surely young in spirit. Her spirit, wisdom, strength and vibrant messages continue to live in the movement.

As part of the Youth Pre-Council Meeting in Phoenix/Arizona in 1987, I and Reem Najjar (who also was representing the Jordan Association as a youth member then), engaged actively in this meeting, delivered our presentations, and strongly voiced our concerns on the human rights violations and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I also attended at least three other World Council meetings since then; in Cairo in 1999 as the National President, in Nairobi in 2007, and this year in Zurich as the National General Secretary. Twenty four years later, we are still under Israeli Occupation, and the women still struggle to survive in dignity, and to cater for the family needs, and to shoulder the whole family as it continues to live in crisis, emergencies, stress and conflict, and the YWCA continues to call for Peace and Justice in the whole Middle East. What is different today is that although our situation did not change, yet the world movement is more supportive, understanding and engaged with us in our struggle for Peace with Justice.

It is interesting that in Zurich, I participated as one of the leading members within the world organization, and I was fortunate to be given the opportunity by the World YWCA to talk about my journey as a leader and about the concept of “inter-generational leadership”, which reflects very much my history in this movement. I used to be a youth member and a voluntary coordinator for youth activities in Jerusalem in the 80’s, and if I was not given the space, the support, the skill training and recognition at the time by the previous General Secretary namely Ms. Doris Salah, as well as Board Members and Presidents, I would not be one of the leaders of our local organization today. It was a historical moment to meet again in Zurich with Doris, and to celebrate this continued leadership within our movement.

So for the YWCA of Palestine, inter-generational leadership is not new, or newly practiced, yet it continues to be a challenge, especially as the numbers of young members continue to diminish, and as the older leaders and members continue to struggle to understand the changing needs, interests, problems and aspirations of the younger generations. The key word is “listening and accommodating”, and we all need to learn to listen to what the young members are telling us, and what they would like to do, and how they would like to engage. The world of 2011 is obviously very different. It is the world of globalization, technology, and what many also see as disintegration of cultures. Thus, the issues facing us all, the way we communicate and the communication tools we use, and existence of social media, are all very different. So for inter-generational leadership to work, all generations have to work hard to bridge that cultural, social, mental and technological gap. It does not happen coincidentally. We, as older leaders of the movement, are called upon today to open our doors, hearts and spaces for the younger people. The youth are also called upon to engage, accept and respect the long history of this movement which was made by these very old or older leaders. Being all together in Zurich convinced me that this can be done. I was very proud to see that four out of the six Vice Presidents elected this year were under the age of 30, and that 44% of the new Board members were also under the age of 30. We could not have a better way of demonstrating our commitment to produce young leaders, and keep the “Y” in the movement very much alive.

Mira Rizek,
National General Secretary,
YWCA of Palestine
The presentations generated a lively discussion and exchange of ideas. The audience asked many questions and presenters provided them with their perspectives on key issues and challenges.

Other highlights during CSW were the World YWCA Intergenerational Dialogue Session, the launch of UN Women, and the submission of the World YWCA’s statement. Participants were also inspired by the Helvi Sipila Seminar (which highlighted issues around girls and women and education,) and by hearing youth perspectives on education. The YWCA of Palestine was excited to be involved in a panel discussion and interactive session hosted by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts (WAGGS), in which Faten Husari participated, and focused on her experiences as a young woman from Palestine. Another key moment was the YWCA worship, which was co-led by Maylena David from the YWCA of Palestine. The worship was joyfully attended by over 40 delegates who sang in different languages.

The YWCA of Palestine discussed issues such as the loss of land, the high level of population density and the separation wall, and the impacts this has had for women and girls in relation to education, training and employment. The presentation identified the ways in which the ongoing conflict has negatively affected women and children. In relation to education, issues explored the physical barriers created by the requirement to go through checkpoints, the biased distribution of limited resources towards men, increased violence and the emerging issues of physiological and post traumatic disorders. The YWCA of Palestine’s work in women’s economic empowerment, children’s cognitive development, advocacy and education were highlighted, as was the need to work specifically with women in keeping hope alive.

The situation of Southern Sudan was also highlighted, and discussion was generated around the huge challenges and the commitment of women who have to travel long distances in perilous conditions to access education. The work of the YWCA of Sudan around creating safe spaces for education, providing classes and working to assist the peace building process was inspiring to all.

The Sri Lanka presentation concentrated on the impact that 30 years of internal conflict has had on the lives of women. Maternal, infant health and employment has also been negatively affected, and the conflict has also meant that there has been no opportunity to look at gender equality within the country. The YWCA of Sri Lanka has been exploring ways to raise awareness on the implementation of UN Resolution 1325.

Under the World YWCA Power to Change Project and through the Y-Global* partnership program with the YWCAs of Palestine, Sudan and Sri Lanka with the support of FOKUS**, three young women from the YWCA of Palestine and one from the YWCA of Sri Lanka participated at CSW*** in Feb-March 2011 in New York City.

Prior to their visit, the young women, namely Faten Husari and Maylena David from the YWCA of Palestine and Sarah Arumugam from the YWCA of Sri Lanka, together with the Supervisor of the Project Arda Aghazarian have been researching existing data in their home countries, networking with women organizations and learning about UN resolutions pertaining to women rights in preparation for their parallel event. The presentation, carried out on the 3rd of March with the support of the World YWCA and Y-Global, focused around women, education and peace building, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

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The YWCA always gives us opportunities to strengthen our work, interpersonal and leadership skills, and most importantly, meeting new people from different backgrounds and different parts of the world. It has been really important for me to get to know the YWCAs worldwide and to understand their type or work. I am now more aware of the scope of the YWCA’s work worldwide, and to be honest I am so glad of what we are doing at the YWCA of Palestine in spite of the political situation we are living in.”

(Faten Husari, Young Woman Participant at CSW from the YWCA of Palestine.)
Young Women, Education and the UN Resolution 1325: Reflections on CSW from a Young Woman Member

Maylena David, YWCA of Palestine

Through my attendance at CSW, I have learned so much about many different countries, the conflict and inequality in these countries, and their view towards women’s education.

I had not been aware that women in developed countries including European countries (such as Finland and the UK) and the USA have also been discriminated against. I was surprised to have found a lot of similarity in women’s issues between developed and third world countries. The discrimination and prevention of education for women turns out to be a worldwide problem; it is not only found in Palestine, but in most countries around the world.

Some of the similar issues and needs I have found are:

• Access to Education: The need to ensure that all girls get access to school (no fees, easy transport, and so on) to both formal and informal education, and to ensure that schools are safe.

• SRHR: To include comprehensive sexual and reproductive education in schools.

• Technology: To have access to technology in schools so that women are able to shape the agenda and benefit from technology (internet, computers, etc.)

• VAW: Muslim women and the challenges of violence and marginalization.

Attending a workshop on the education of women from Kenya and from several African countries has been eye opening. It has allowed me to witness and experience the suffering and discrimination that the women in these countries had to face in order to get education. These women have put their lives on the line so as to become educated and to educate and empower other women in their countries. We need to have this kind of commitment and determination in order to develop our country and create a better and safer world for all women and for the coming generations.

In another workshop (on violence against women,) I was so proud of Faten’s ability to respond to some of the issues discussed. She seemed very informed of the subject and presented herself well, and she was proud to present the YWCA of Palestine. Moreover, Arda did a great job in responding to questions in several occasions. A few delegates pointed her out and asked her to say few things about the YWCA and she did a very good job.

I am also proud of our YWCA representatives with regard to our parallel event. They did a very good job in preparing and presenting our power point presentation. We seem to have enlightened a big group of people of our situation and of the conflict that is affecting us on different levels, and we had much positive feedback from different people. It was a great pleasure to work with Arda and Faten, both of whom have been wonderful roommates, friends and co-workers.

One point I would like to comment on is with regard to preparation and/or orientation for CSW attendance. Thorough orientation would have been much appreciated. However, having Arda with us was very helpful; she showed us directions and informed us of how the system works, which made a big difference. Without her I think I would have been lost. The YWCA groups from other countries have also been helpful. They informed us of the schedule-for-the-day and informed us of important sessions which would be important for each of the YWCAs in different countries to attend.

In conclusion to the enriching experience at CSW, I find that we need more commitment and proactive work from younger and older women in our association in Palestine in order to properly do advocacy work and improve the status of women in our country and worldwide.
Despite some similarities in the problems of the young people around the globe, the reality of the Palestinian youth is still unusual and different from any other place on earth. The complicated political and economic situations resulting from over four decades of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land has caused, and is still causing, severe damage to the youth sector. The absence of any proper political solution to the conflict, uncertainty about future perspectives and hopelessness reinforces the feeling of alienation and confusion among youth.

In recognition of the specific nature of youth issues and the interconnection between these issues and the overall political, economic and social challenges faced by the Palestinian society, we have noted that youth issues must be placed centrally on our agendas. Our proposed Youth Entrepreneurs Training at the Ramallah YWCA, is a youth empowerment project with the prime objective to empower youth by providing basic knowledge to address the multiple facets of youth challenges that impede their ability to develop diverse viable entrepreneurial skills and employment opportunities; engage as citizens in local issues that affect them; and empower themselves to be positive forces for change in their communities.

Typically, young people are seen as recipients of development programming, and have few opportunities to influence decisions affecting their lives or have a voice in their communities. Our approach, on the other hand, considers youth participation as a critical aspect of positive youth developments. We believe that when young people have a genuine voice in development, there are real gains for themselves and their communities. This approach has thus a great potential to empower youth by involving them in decision-making, addressing their needs and priorities and promoting their active engagement in building a better future for their communities.

Although the reality of small business start-up rarely lives up to the fast track that many youth dream of, we believe that youth involvement in entrepreneurship programs will offer several benefits regardless of whether youth end up starting profitable businesses or not. The skills associated with entrepreneurship include the ability to take initiative and creatively seek out and identify opportunities; develop budgets and project resource needs and potential income; understand options for developing needed capital and trade-offs associated with different options; and communicate effectively and market oneself and one’s ideas.

We are passionate in our belief that educated, employed, and engaged young people possess the power to solve the world’s toughest problems. Every young person therefore deserves the opportunity to realize his or her full potential. We aspire that our Youth Entrepreneurs Trainings will be catalysts for change that will help youth learn, work, and lead.
Empowering Women and Mothers:
The Silent Terrors of Birth in Jerusalem

Hanan Rafidi Kamar

When I joined the YWCA of Jerusalem team as Executive Director in late October 2009, I found that the Women’s Rights Department was in the process of finalizing an extremely interesting study by Dr. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian entitled: *Military Occupation, Trauma and the Violence of Exclusion: Trapped Bodies and Lives.* Once I found out about this study, I did my best to help introduce it to the public and all concerned parties in the shape that it should be presented in. Later on, the study’s steering committee decided to initiate a new study under the title: “Birth in Jerusalem”.

Exploring the themes of birth delivery and childbearing in Jerusalem seemed like a very interesting topic for the committee members (including myself,) as it would shed light on a distinctive experience that Palestinian women are going through in silence. However, the issue for me, on the personal level, meant much more beyond that.

Being a Palestinian woman from the West Bank, married to a man from Jerusalem, and being the mother of two kids (the youngest of which is around two years old,) the issue of women’s experience in giving birth in Jerusalem evoked all the memories in me and brought back the bitter feelings I had when I was pregnant with my youngest child, Talya.

At that time, I was the Head of the Advocacy Department at the Women’s Affairs Technical Committee in Ramallah, and I used to travel every day from Jerusalem to Ramallah and back, crossing Qalandia checkpoint (now terminal) on a daily basis.

Through this journey, I experienced multiple risks that affected me both physically as well as emotionally. Amongst the many dangers I was subjected to, I experienced the high risk of abortion upon having severe bleeding at the checkpoint during my fifth week of pregnancy. This forced me to stay in bed for around 17 days with minimum movement, and I was required to take a lot of medicine to strengthen my shape. This experience left a strong impact on my character during my pregnancy, and it instilled in me the sense of guilt. I felt very much attached to the baby in my womb, and I constantly apologized for having risked her life (at that time, I was not aware of the sex of the baby.)

Moreover, I was always scared of having parturition while in Ramallah. To give birth there would make me responsible for depriving my child from the Jerusalem identity, and thereby from the opportunity of living in Jerusalem. The possibility of giving birth to my beloved baby in Ramallah was driving me crazy and affecting my nervous system. I used to ask myself, what would we as a family be able to do if this happens?

For all the above reasons, I am very much convinced that the YWCA of Jerusalem’s decision to prepare a study on such a sensitive topic as birth in Jerusalem and to delve into the subject matter from a non-traditional and personal point of view has been the right decision to make.

The study “Birth in Jerusalem” will be launched at the YWCA in summer 2012.
“Nonviolence is a Weapon of the Strong”: The YWCA of India’s Response to the Situation in Palestine

Leila Passah

“Nonviolence is a Weapon of the Strong” – Mahatma Gandhi

This powerful quote comes to mind when we reflect on the journey of thousands of Palestinians who have faced oppression, humiliation and all forms of injustice under the Israeli occupation, the thousands of women and girls who also face violence and live and work in a culture of fear and where children grow in an environment of terror and insecurity. This society continues to struggle for an independent state by forging ahead with faith, hope and dignity, fighting for a just cause.

The Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, a document produced by a group of Palestinian Christians, captures the reality on the ground and continues to express hope in the midst of hopelessness. When one reads the document, one is compelled to draw closer to the human tragedy of a people who do not have a solid ground or a state to call their own.

How should we react?

We in India cannot afford not to react, as we were one of the early strong nations, who were so proud to stand by the Palestinian cause, reflecting uncompromising foreign policies that clearly stood for Peace and Justice. But today we are no longer able to boast of the same. Instead, we hang our heads in shame because of the compromises we have made, including being one of the largest importers of arms from Israel. Is this due to effects of globalization, or the urgency to compete with other nations, in the race for being an economic giant? But at what cost should we compromise? We need to be seen as a giant fighting for human rights of all peoples, especially women and children who often become the prime victims of violence and terror. We need to urge all countries, especially from the South, to lobby with their respective governments, to push for justice, freedom and sustained peace in Palestine.

What about the YWCA response?

The YWCA of India has joined hands with other National Ecumenical movements and the National Council of Churches, to develop advocacy based projects and increase people’s awareness and involvement with the struggles of the Palestinians through joint programs on advocacy and community action.

For instance, we have held candle light vigils in the capital city during Palm Sunday, to express our solidarity with the Palestinian Christians who were denied their basic rights to worship in holy places in Jerusalem. A silent expression of protest and later awareness to the public about the plight of the Palestinians was presented by the Palestinian Ambassador. We also joined in joint ecumenical worship services around the country, to pray for Peace in Israel-Palestine during a whole month in June. Panel discussion and dialogue around peace, education, and Indian ecumenical response to the question of Palestine, was filmed and uploaded onto YouTube, and later screened on the wall of Jerusalem during the World Week for Peace organized by the WCC.
The YWCA of Palestine celebrates the 10th Anniversary of the YWCA Jericho Food Project

On the 24th of March 2011, the YWCA of Jericho celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Food Project. We congratulate the delightful team on this event, and thank them for investing their time, skills, reliability and warmth in which they have been carrying out and bringing life into the project.

ISEN (The India Solidarity Ecumenical Network) of which the YWCA of India is co-convenor, is planning on more advocacy initiatives like developing a strategy for BDS, planning a visit to Palestine for a group inclusive of church leaders, women, young people, Dalits and Tribals to study the situation and encounter with the local communities, and return to India as advocates for social change and justice. As part of an advocacy strategy, we are also planning a visit of a Palestinian theologian, who will train with theological colleges and ecumenical movements like the YWCA and the Student Christian Movement, through seminars and workshops on issues affecting Palestinians, and explore dialogue on challenges that confront India like fascism, and increasing fundamentalism that leaves little room for tolerance and communal harmony.

India and Palestine can find common creative ways to address issues that threaten human rights of peoples, especially those of the Palestinians. We are committed to work with you and are in solidarity, as you:

- fight for your freedom from oppression and occupation
- fight against increasing settlements that ravage your land and natural resources
- take risks to resist and protest the daily humiliation faced at military check points
- fight for freedom of access to holy places
- fight for the release of thousands of innocent people who are imprisoned daily
- fight against Israeli disregard for International law and resolutions

It is time once again, to hear the voices of as many nations and people, who can put an end to such forms of illegal occupation, violence, human rights violations, by putting pressure on every government to take a position to support the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people. When will the international community take up the responsibility to ensure that justice will be realised and that Palestine will have its free independent state, to re-build and reconstruct a new nation?

They have waited, and waited patiently and with dignity. It is our time as part of the international community to respond with courage and bold initiatives to support their cause for just peace.

“It was a time when the unthinkable became the thinkable and the impossible really happened” – Arundhati Roy (Indian woman author)
I returned to Palestine this summer as a JAI volunteer, three years since I participated in the 2008 Journey for Justice Program. Whenever anyone has asked me about my return, I’ve responded by saying: “I left a piece of myself in Palestine, so I have to go back to find it.” That piece of myself has been invested in the struggle for rights, equality, justice and freedom in Palestine, and it is what is driving me to continue to work to develop ways in which international YWCAs might strengthen our partnerships in Palestine to enhance our solidarity with our sister organization there. As I see it, international YWCAs engaging in solidarity with Palestinians in their struggle to end occupation and attain peace with justice have plentiful opportunities to improve upon the initiatives already being undertaken. In doing so, however, I think it is important to remind ourselves that we as outsiders do not have the answers.

We as outsiders can never know the disheartening truth of the experience of living without our fundamental human rights, regardless of how many times we visit the territories, regardless of how many articles we write or olive trees we sponsor. Palestinians know what Palestine needs. So it is important for us then as international supporters to listen, to be open, to learn, to trust and to do our best to accommodate the needs expressed by our colleagues on the ground, focusing specifically on how we can translate these needs to our local audiences in order to raise awareness and action. There is a chance for us to get more young women, both international and Palestinian, involved in working together, connecting with each other and learning from each other. I feel that too many women where I come from, for example, have reserves of energy and passion directed at the cause of freedom, yet still are not well connected to the realities of occupation, apartheid and colonization in Palestine. If given the chance to experience a real and genuine connection, our international support ceases to be about trying to make sense and rationalize a conflict that does not make sense and is not rational. Connecting with one another is what gives us the chance to act from a place of friendship, love and duty to those we care about, and a duty to making things right. This is what I think makes solidarity thrive. After spending six weeks back in Palestine this summer, I have come away with such reflections, which I hope will help me strengthen my own advocacy work for Palestine in the years to come. I do, however, think that I have left another piece of myself behind again...
World Council Reflections
WOMEN CREATING A SAFE WORLD
27th World YWCA Council and International Women’s Summit

July 10-16, 2011 Zurich, Switzerland

Over 850 women from 115 YWCA delegations came together as one decision-making body in Zurich this summer. After receiving inspiration from the Young Women’s Leadership Dialogue and the Pre-Council, delegates from every corner of the globe flooded Zurich to discuss the topic, “Women Creating a Safe World.”

Among the key speakers at the International Women’s Summit (IWS) were Dr. Michelle Bachelet (Executive Director, UN Women,) Mary Robinson (Chair, Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice,) Rima Salah (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; former Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF,) and H.E. Thokozani Khupe (Deputy Prime Minister of Zimbabwe and President of UNAIDS Global Power Network for Africa on HIV). The Mary Robinson Awards for Young Women’s Leadership in Human Rights were launched at the IWS for the first time.

Plenary and breakout sessions with high level speakers were well-attended during the program, as were the skills building and resolution workshops facilitated by the YWCA movement and partners. The IWS was followed by the 3-day business meeting, where critical decisions regarding the movement were made. The movement was thrilled to celebrate the affiliation of two new YWCAs, namely the YWCA of Haiti and the YWCA of the US Virgin Islands.

The YWCA of Palestine was present with a full delegation of six at World Council, represented by the National President Abla Nasir, National Vice-President Haifa Baramki, National General Secretary Mira Rizek, YWCA Jerusalem Board Member Sandrine Amer, YWCA Jericho Member Queen Massoud and YWCA Ramallah Program Officer Faten Husari. Also present was Arda Aghazarian, the young woman World Board Member of the Middle East Region (2007-2011) from the YWCA of Palestine.
The YWCA of Palestine had a leading role in a good number of sessions and workshops in Zurich. Prior to their participation at World Council, all delegates attended local meetings in preparation for the International visit and presentations. In addition to facilitating two worships, some of the sessions that the YWCA of Palestine took a lead in included:

- The Pre-Council Young Women’s Leadership Dialogue
- The Pre-Council Session on Movement Building and Intergenerational Leadership
- The Breakout Session on the Arab Revolutions and the Impact on Women (Middle East YWCAs)
- The Breakout Session on Innovative Partnerships for Promoting Women’s Political Leadership (YWCAs of USA, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Palestine, Honduras and Zimbabwe)
- The Breakout Session on Intergenerational Dialogue on Faith, Culture and Women’s Rights (World YWCA and UNFPA)
- The Breakout Session on Strengthening Community Peace Building and Implementation of UN Resolution 1325 (Femmes Africa Solidarité, YWCAs of Sudan, Palestine, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe)
- The Workshop and Skills Building Session on The Olive Tree Planting (YWCA of the Netherlands and YWCA Palestine)

The delegates also attended other breakout sessions and workshops, and joined in the regional meetings and visioning breakout sessions.

Among the highlights at World Council this year was the official endorsement of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign that pushes for the compliance of International law when it comes to Palestinian rights.

Also among the highlights were the nominations of three women from the Middle East Region for World Board, namely Haifa Baramki from the YWCA of Palestine, and the two young women: Hoda El Mankabady from the YWCA of Egypt and Nagham Nassar from the YWCA of Lebanon.

The new Board of the World YWCA was elected amidst a flurry of excitement, laughter, red cards and applause. Headed by the new President Deborah Thomas (Trinidad & Tobago), the new Board is now made up of 18 women, 8 of whom are young women. The role of Treasurer has been assumed by Carolyn Flowers (USA). Representing the Middle East Region on the World YWCA Board are Haifa Baramki (Palestine) and Hoda Kamal El Mankabady (Egypt).

Overall, the 27th World Council has been an enriching experience, and the movement can now look forward to the next World Council, which will be held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2015.
**World Council Reflections**

*Abla Nasir, President, YWCA of Palestine*

This was my second world council. The first was in Brisbane, Australia (2003), which had given me an overwhelming feeling of belonging to a movement that brings together millions of women from so many countries. Over 1000 women attended that council, many of whom were from the Islands and introduced us to their culture and to the challenges they face in their countries. There were important resolutions that were made in Brisbane, and there were many workshops that touched on critical issues in human rights and violations against women. There were also tribunals shared by women living in areas of conflict and from minorities (like the Sami arctic indigenous people of Sweden who are not recognized in their own country, the indigenous Australians, and so on.) It was indeed a very rich experience.

I value the time our delegation put together in preparing for World Council this year. We were very well prepared as a team, and we attended the council as a team. Each one of us had certain responsibilities and made her contribution in a very special and outstanding way. What stays with me also in a very positive way at World Council was meeting some old friends from the time I was General Secretary. The strolls through the town of Zurich were also much enjoyable; not to forget the rides in the tram, the special ice cream, the chocolates and the hotdog sandwiches!

*Mira Rizek, National General Secretary, YWCA of Palestine*

The Middle East YWCAs’ Workshop on “Arab Women in the Aftermath of the Uprisings” has been organized and presented at World Council during a very relevant time for the region. Some of the objectives of this workshop included: for each of the YWCAs in the region to present political analysis and scenarios from their own perspectives (as women and women organizations); analyze how this “Arab Spring” is or will be impacting women, their role and status; and finally, how the outcomes of the current protests will impact the identity, constituency, role and future of the YWCAs as women and youth organizations in the region.

The workshop was well-attended and well-received. The four associations in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine prepared presentations on how the situation affects them, how they see the way forward and what changes may need to be made.
The workshop emphasized the “Dignity, Human Security and Economic Stability of People in the Middle East” Resolution of the YWCA which was adopted in Nairobi (2007), and called once again for the active implementation of the action plan of the resolution.

It has become obvious that the plight, struggle and challenge of working for Peace with Justice in the region continue to be on top of the agenda of the YWCAs in the region. Creating safe spaces for women and creating a better future for our children and youth was highlighted, and the relevance of what the YWCAs have been doing and continue to do were obvious.

The National Office of the YWCA of Palestine continues to advocate for Peace with Justice and to build partnerships along these lines.

According to the “Dignity, Human Security and Economic Stability of People in the Middle East” Resolution (adopted in Nairobi, 2007), there are three practical steps of action that need to be undertaken by local YWCAs, national YWCAs and the World YWCA for implementation of the recommendation:

- The World YWCA and National YWCAs around the World are urged to call for the end of all military aggressions and occupations of Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq and urge their respective governments and UN Agencies to call on all parties to promote Peace with Justice.
- The World YWCA and National YWCAs around the World are called upon to continue to educate and raise awareness regarding the root causes of the conflict in the Middle East, violations of human rights in the region, and support all previous Middle East Resolutions from 1967 to 2003, including support to the Olive Tree Campaign.
- Demonstrate your support to the Middle East region by supporting skill training, social and psychological counseling and professional/career development for women, as well as educational, social and psychological support to children who are victims of the continued escalation of military aggression in their countries as well as the Middle East Region.

Queen Massoud, Member, YWCA of Jericho

Getting the chance to be part of a world council that includes more than 800 women from all over the world is surely a good opportunity for a woman, and even more so for a young woman.

For me as a young woman, to be involved in such a council that includes a full program of sessions, presentations and experience-sharing discussions gives me an incentive to be more involved in social activities and voluntary work. Being in such a venue with so many people from different parts of the world also brings forth many stories based on different cultural experiences.

The pre-council young women’s leadership dialogue is very interesting and also important for us to attend as young members, especially those of us living in conflict areas. It gives us a sense that the concept of leadership and SRHR should be born from within.

Moreover, to attend such a council as YWCA members from the Middle East region gives us the chance to meet with members
from our region and get a grasp of how they work through their associations and what programs they are doing, and to also look into opportunities through which we could strengthen the communication between us.

Taking part in such a council makes us realize that we sometimes let ourselves live in our own self-built small world, and we forget that the world is huge. This type of attendance reminds us that there are other people out there; people whose existence we may not have previously known about, but who are nevertheless facing issues that are quite similar to ours.

Note: In addition to her contribution as a YWCA of Palestine delegate in Zurich, Queen Massoud has also been appointed as a Member of the Steering Committee during World Council.

A positive difference I have noticed in comparison to the first world council I attended in Nairobi (2007) was in our regional meeting. I believe that our associations in the Middle East have started to believe and give the chance for the young women to take part in the decision-making process. I hope that we as young women can also transfer the expertise to other young women in our associations so that they would also be encouraged to be members of the YWCA.

Faten Husari, Program Officer, YWCA of Ramallah

This experience has been different from any other training or conference I had previously attended. Taking part at World Council has given me the chance to get introduced to different YWCAs around the world, attend sessions by renowned women leaders, and to directly observe the election process and the ways to deal with conflicts and problems within a global forum. It has also been a great pleasure to be there in person as the names of the new World YWCA Board Members were announced. It is a great advantage and privilege for us as the YWCA of Palestine and the Middle East Region to have two representatives from our region; one of them being from our association.

What was most impressive at World Council, and what I think made it successful, was the volunteering that was done. More than 500 volunteers from the YWCA/YMCA Switzerland were assisting the delegates from the moment they arrived until they left the last day. The volunteers have made themselves available for any assistance throughout the council; they have been taking us to our hotels and escorting us to the conference building on a daily basis. This truly represents what the YWCA is all about: having such enthusiastic and vigorous individuals volunteering for their organization, for their society, and for other people. This should keep us working harder to raise a generation of youth in our organizations with a good understanding about the importance of community work for their mental, social and personal skills in order to reach to better positions in their communities, and to take part in building a better, and more promising future.
Sandrine Amer, Board Member, YWCA of Jerusalem

It was a real pleasure to co-facilitate the Olive Tree Planting workshop together with the YWCA of the Netherlands. Prior to our visit to Zurich, our delegation participated in the young women’s training in Ramallah on advocacy and lobbying. This training was very helpful not only for the new young women members, but also for those of us who already had an idea about the YWCA advocacy programs. The training gave us better insight about the JAI program, the Kairos document, SCR1325 and the BDS campaign. Experts on advocacy from different backgrounds shared valuable information on these topics, which helped us in our preparations. After the training, our team (namely Ms. Abla Nasir, Ms. Haifa Baramki and myself) set up side-meetings where we brainstormed further and jointly prepared for our power point presentation. We were happy with the final result in Zurich. Our workshop with the YWCA of Netherlands was successfully attended by a good number of people. The best thing about the workshop was that it was done in a participatory manner and turned out to be a fun and humorous session. Many of the participants expressed that they truly enjoyed the session, that it raised their awareness on the conflict in Palestine, and made them interested to find out more and be involved with the JAI.

Gulay Fitoz, Board Member, YWCA of the Netherlands

I was delighted to work together with the YWCA of Palestine in promoting the Olive Tree Campaign during World Council in Zurich. Our main goal was to create awareness about the situation in Palestine and gain support for the Olive Tree campaign. In addition, I had the pleasure of meeting my Palestinian sisters. Even though they are among a people whose rights are being violated on a permanent base, they talked about the situation with so much dignity and without showing any sign of despair. I admire their hopefulness, and we will always support their call for justice in Palestine. Having witnessed the enthusiasm of the public during the workshop, I am sure that in the time ahead of us, great steps will be made by other YWCAs in joining the OTC and keep hope alive.
Sarah Arumugam, Board Member, YWCA of Sri Lanka

My first presentation (on behalf of the YWCA of Sri Lanka) with the YWCA of Palestine and other YWCAs in countries of conflict was at CSW in New York earlier this year. The session focused around women, education, peace building, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

I still remember the session as being very profound and impressive. The panellists shared real stories of war-torn countries, and participants were able to get an insight to situations in conflict countries. The stories of these countries were unique to their contexts and also some situations were similar to each other. Therefore, this was an opportunity to learn and adopt from each other. I was immensely impressed and touched by the presentation of YWCA of Palestine at CSW. I identified some similar issues that they faced, such as checkpoints. While the presentation was on, I was reflecting and relating my situation back at home during the thirty year civil war. I was a victim of harassments in the checkpoints just for being from a minority group. The sharing of the Palestinian YWCA made me think that it is not only me; I was not alone; there are others like me, and we all can work in solidarity towards one common goal “Peace with Justice”.

I was honoured to take part in a similar workshop again at Zurich this year on “Strengthening Community Peace Building and Implementation of UN Resolution 1325” together with the YWCA of Palestine and other YWCAs in conflict-driven areas. During the presentations, I felt that there were sisters around the world whom I could connect with; share my experiences, share our grievances and cry out free together in solidarity with other sisters as we were in a safe space. Both workshops (at CSW and at World Council) have been enormously encouraging and moving, and I felt the power of being connected at a global level.

It is very important for us to address our issues globally and connect with similar countries together with the supportive countries who advocate these issues, so that we can lobby the governments and other relevant parities that are responsible to make the required atmosphere to bring peace to mankind.
The Middle East Region’s Outgoing and Incoming World YWCA Board Members

The YWCA of Palestine would like to thank all the World YWCA Board Officers and Members 2007-2011 for their great efforts and leadership during the past four years, and wishes the new Board the best of luck for the coming four years.

The movement would not be the same without the commitment, loyalty and guidance with which all associations express their duties towards reaching the common vision for a fully inclusive world where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment are promoted and sustained through women’s leadership.

The YWCA of Palestine would like to congratulate Haifa Baramki (YWCA Palestine) and Hoda El Mankabady (YWCA of Egypt) for being elected as the new World YWCA Board Members from the Middle East. The YWCA of Palestine would also like to thank Reem Najjar (YWCA Jordan) and Arda Aghazarian (YWCA Palestine) for having served on the World YWCA Board on behalf of the Middle East Region.

VISIONING THE FUTURE OF THE YWCA

In 2007, the Board Members from the Middle East Region shared their visions for the next four years (2007-2011) as follows:

“My vision is for a world movement that continuously adopts global priorities and works actively on them. A movement that continues to work actively on women’s and girls’ empowerment; assist national and local associations in planning and implementing their projects; network with international and UN organizations with similar mission; and advocate strongly on crucial issues such as peace, women and children’s rights, violence against women, economic justice and HIV/AIDS.” (Reem Najjar, 2007.)

“Coming from this part of the world and looking at the major political, social and economic barriers from my spot, it becomes a challenge sometimes to even keep a vision [which the YWCA essentially represents.] In this respect, my vision is that the World YWCA would continue to be a source of inspiration to women all over the world. Despite the challenges that each individual woman undergoes on different levels, it is always empowering to know that she is not alone”. (Arda Aghazarian, 2007.)
On Being a Young Woman World YWCA Board Member (2007-2011)

*Arda Aghazarian*

Thanks to the YWCA movement, I have been given the opportunity to be the first young woman from the Middle East to be a member of its world board. When I think back of the skills, experience and wisdom gained through this opportunity during those past four years, I cannot help but think back of how it all started:

Perhaps the best word to describe how it felt to be nominated by the YWCA of Palestine for World Board (in 2007) would be through the word: *thrown*. This endeavor, in some ways, felt like I was being *thrown* into challenges. To represent the Middle East region in such an enormous movement was a task that would require lots of discipline, loyalty and responsibility. At a certain moment, I remember having had doubts about my own capacities as a young woman as I wondered how beneficial I would be to a board that is made up of highly-skilled and experienced women within the movement. After expressing these initial sentiments with Mrs. Hanadi Soudah-Younan (then-President of the YWCA of Palestine), I recall that she did not take my doubting voice seriously or even ask why I felt that way. Instead, she overlooked my concerns and said: “You can handle it.” That was minutes before we sent in my application form.

By the time our complete delegation was in Kenya, I realized that this initial feeling of being *thrown* into random yet serious situations would become frequent. One of the instances I recall (during World Council Nairobi) was when I was spontaneously requested to get up on stage and express my sentiments about world poverty to a large audience made up of hundreds of women. “I’m not too sure about this,” I remember thinking, but when I looked at my fellow-young women delegates from the YWCA of Palestine (Queen Massoud and Dima Yasser,) they told me that they could not wait for my speech. They believed that I would be up to the challenge.

This recurrent trend of being *thrown* into situations that require leadership skills, strength and knowledge, accompanied with the encouragement received from mentors is what I will remember most from these experiences at the YWCA. Whether in Kenya, Switzerland, the US or Palestine, I have come to learn that having a foundation that enables a young woman to be challenged with new duties and responsibilities have significant ways in empowering young women and enable their sense of trust to lead the way.

Four years after Nairobi, I was spontaneously *thrown* into a slightly similar situation in Zurich as I was asked to deliver the visioning report to over 800 people. “Uh oh…Do I need to get up on stage?” I joked with Deborah Thomas, the new President-elect of the World YWCA who was sitting next to me. “Oh Arda,” she smiled, “you know we have faith in you. You make us proud.”

I thank all the YWCA board members, co-workers, mentors and friends for *throwing* me into the world, knowing full well that I would pull through. At this stage, I am most pleased to do a little bit of *throwing* myself, and encourage young women to realize that they already are leaders; and that they could have the space to be themselves.
Four years later, in 2011, it looks like the vision of the YWCA remains a source of inspiration to women all over the world. In thinking of their visions for the next four years (2011-2015), the incoming Board Members from the Middle East Region share their visions for the movement as follows:

**Hoda El Mankabady, Board Member, YWCA of Egypt**

My vision in relation to young women at the YWCA is to create an enabling environment for young women to blossom and take the lead to change. This is through attracting them to work not only as volunteers but involve them more in the association’s work. Young women should work with the movement and advocate for priority issues and reach out to more and more young people.

As for the HIV and AIDS component as one of the World YWCA strategic plan’s priority issue, we would need to work on two levels: The first would be to create more knowledge about the epidemic by holding more and more global awareness campaigns about the nature of the epidemic; how it can be contracted and how it can be prevented. And the second is to work with the community on the acceptance of people living with HIV and AIDS in order to create a more functional community, and a less judging one.

On violence against women: We would need to work towards a safer environment for women and girls. A safe environment for women and girls means a safer environment for all.

Finally, it is critical to sustain and maintain the respect of all human beings and recognize their values to their communities. My vision is to ensure that at least one of the pillars on which the Constitution was built (justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment) is part of each and every project document/proposal submitted by the YWCA to any donor to ensure a unified vision of the associations worldwide.

**Haifa Baramki, Vice-President, YWCA of Palestine**

Success in attaining any goal one plans and works for is usually satisfying and rewarding. This is how I felt when the results of the elections were announced. However, I could not have done this alone. The support of the members of our delegation all through the conference prior to the Election Day built up my confidence and increased my chances of success. The support of the numerous partners we as YWCA of Palestine have among the 125 YWCAs around the world, also increased my chances of winning these elections. In reality, the YWCA of Palestine is the real winner of this election.

I am really privileged to be on the board of an organization with a social agenda advocating the voice of women, and one that has always taken a strong position and stand in support of women’s human rights wherever that support and advocacy have been needed. Therefore, as a member of the decision making body of the World YWCA, I feel I am responsible for supporting the carrying out of the strategic framework of the organization 2011 – 2015 with its three main goals of Women’s Intergenerational Leadership; Women’s rights and Movement Building and Good Governance.
As to my role on this Board, I expect as a member of a team that comes from different areas of the world, to draw first the attention to the problems of my region, to look globally at the larger picture and draw attention to other areas that merit the attention of the Board and the movement.

One of the highlights during World Council was the visioning process; a process launched by the World Board to envision the YWCA movement in the year 2035. The process is based on the fact that if the YWCA, as a global movement with outreach to over 25 million women and girls in over 120 countries, is able to combine the collective knowledge and skills, the human and financial resources, as well as the influence of the networks and outreach, then it will be able to catalyze significant improvement in the lives of women and girls worldwide.

The visioning process was divided into 10 visioning workshops (each facilitated by two world board nominees) in order to engage all delegates and observers in an interactive discussion. The discussion and the flow of different views around the structure, composition, focus and involvement of the YWCA in 2035 in the workshop that I co-facilitated has been very energizing. Even though there was not enough time to go much deeper into our interesting discussions, our group came up with common messages related namely to continue focusing on intergenerational leadership development and engagement of the youth in the movement, centralization of the principle of human values as bases for the movement and as strong incentives bases to achieve justice, peace, human dignity, freedom and sustainable environment for all people.

In comparing where we, as the YWCA of Palestine, are in relation to this vision, I believe we have started to focus on the intergenerational leadership as we are requesting from all our members to increase their efforts in recruiting young women and in planning activities for this purpose that guarantee their actual involvement in the decision making process. I believe that replicating the visioning session to get input from all the members about envisioning the Palestinian movement would be an energizing activity for all.