

PWWSD receives the First Lady of Germany at its Headquarters in Ramallah



Ramallah- May 9, 2017: The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD) received a German delegation headed by the First Lady of Germany, Ms. Elke Bündenbender, wife of the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, accompanied by HE Ola Awad, her personal assistant Ms. Casdorff, and Ms. Springer, Deputy Chair Woman of Axel Sringer Foundation in Germany. The delegation was received on May 9, 2017 at the headquarters of PWWSD in Ramallah in cooperation with the German Representative Office.

Ms. Amal Khreisheh, Director of PWWSD, Dr. Reham Halaseh, Director of Programs and Development at PWWSD, Ms. Amal Masri Daraghmeh, an entrepreneur and economic expert, Ms. Hazam Tahboub, human rights and a feminist activist, Ms. Suha Jarrar, a researcher and youth activist, received the delegation.

Ms. Amal Khreisheh welcomed the German delegation and presented a brief summary of the work and activities of PWWSD. She also referred to the deep implications of the occupation measures on Palestinian women, especially the mothers, wives, and families of 1,800 Palestinian prisoners who are currently on a hunger strike demanding the abolition of administrative detention, solitary confinement and other requests guaranteed by the Fourth Geneva Convention. She pointed out that ending the occupation is fundamental for achieving a just peace based on the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Ms. Khreisheh said that Palestinian women have a strong will aimed towards achieving freedom and equality, utilizing international instruments. She also mentioned the obstacles women face in implementing the content of CEDAW, which was signed by the Palestinian National Authority without reservation. Ms. Khreisheh also called for the need to raise the voice of Palestinian women to the German government and people and the need to hold Israel accountable for its violations of Palestinian human rights.

Dr. Reham Halaseh, Director of Programs and Development at PWWSD, said that Palestinian women were and still are partners in the Palestinian struggle for liberation, and they have an equal right to participate in decision-making at all levels. She added that PWWSD works on increasing the level of women's political participation through awareness raising, education, mobilization, lobbying, and capacity building activities and prepares them to run for the elections. As an example, she referred to PWWSD's initiative in forming "Shadow Councils" to enhance women political participation; around fifty women from the Shadow Councils are currently running in the local elections scheduled to be held on the 13th of this month. Dr. Halaseh also noted that PWWSD won the "MANARA" Award, which was organized last year by GIZ at a regional level in the field of women political participation.

Minister Ola Awad praised the role of PWWSD for its constant follow up of women's status quo in Palestine, whether they work in the private sector, civil society organizations, or political and official institutions. She noted that despite of the high rate of educated Palestinian women, still, their participation in the political and economic spheres is low in comparison to men's involvement in these sectors. As such, women's education and perseverance in being part of the public life is not reflected in reality, especially within the economic sector, due to high unemployment rates, lack of opportunities, and lack of resources within the political, economic, and social contexts.

Ms. Suha Jarrar, a human rights researcher and youth activist, spoke on behalf of the Palestinian youth. She noted that the Palestinian youth's attempt to seize opportunities and move forward in life is not easy with the Israeli occupation, lack of opportunities, and the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian economy. Ms. Jarrar stated that the youth remain one of the excluded groups from political participation, especially young women, and are deprived of their basic rights to start families because of the Judaization of Jerusalem, and the closure of the Gaza Strip. She stressed that the international community is therefore responsible for holding Israel accountable for its violations of human rights.

Ms. Hazam Tahboub discussed the issue of 50,000 Palestinians living in the Old City of Hebron who face daily violations from Israeli settlers and have to go through checkpoints, the execution of children and running them over, rubbish dumping and stones throwing, the confiscation of houses, and the lack of the most basic services. Ms. Tahboub praised the efforts of youth initiatives of hundreds of volunteers who organize cultural activities to enhance women self-confidence, help them engage in the public sphere and support the resilience and protection of marginalized families.

Ms. Kholoud AlFaqih, the first woman to serve as a Palestinian judge, presented her experience of working with Palestinian families within the Personal Status Law. She pointed to the multiplicity of sources of legislation in Palestine; the Jordanian, Ottoman, Egyptian, British Mandate Laws and Israeli law in Jerusalem. These old laws contradict with the principle of equality and promote discrimination against women. Ms. AlFaqih indicated that administrative measures were taken and drafts were prepared to address the problems of custody, divorce, alimony, child marriage, and other issues related to the Personal Status Law.

Ms. Amal Daraghmeh Masri expressed her concern with the future of Palestinian women. As a Palestinian businesswoman, she faces many challenges related to the continuation of the Israeli occupation measures and restrictions imposed to weaken the Palestinian economy and increase its dependency on the Israeli economy. She mentioned that Germany is fully aware of all of the Israeli occupation measures and is responsible for holding it accountable within international laws. Ms. Masri also stated that the BDS movement should not be criminalized since it is based on the norms of the International Humanitarian Law and represents a civil movement and a tool for facing the Israeli apartheid system.

It is worth mentioning that Ms. Bienenbender, the first lady of German, served as a judge and is a human rights activist in Germany. She is conducting this visit with her husband the German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier.