

# YWCA Newsletter



Empowering and Supporting Youth  
as Advocates for Justice

Volume 1, Spring 2016



This issue of our newsletter focuses on the YWCA's work with leadership development with our youth in the area of just peace. Leadership development has always been important to the National YWCA of Palestine, which started many years ago. Recently though, substantial steps have been taken to bring the young women to the forefront of our work which the YWCA of Palestine is doing around peace and justice. In addition to encouraging our associations to elect youth to their local boards, and ensure a 25% representation as a minimum, a policy requirement which we agreed on a long time ago, we decided to also train and support our youth to work on key issues related to peace and justice.

In August of 2015 The National YWCA of Palestine created the Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force, from members nominated from the local associations. One of its primary goals is to train our youth as trainers and enable them to support other youth members, particularly our young women members in the local associations, on human rights issues, and constraints to peace. We also are helping them to develop skills in conflict resolution, and how to participate in international forums like the World YWCA Council meetings or the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) gathering that takes place yearly at the UN in New York, or other international platforms.

In this issue of our newsletter you will learn about this new Task Force and read reflections from our delegation that attended the 28th World YWCA Council conference in Bangkok, Thailand from October 11-18th with a focus on Bold and Transformative Leadership. In addition, to reporting on the envisioning process that took place and the Call to Action from YWCA's in the Middle East from our General Secretary, Ms. Mira Rizeq, you will also learn about the history of past resolutions. Finally you will learn about our three youth delegates and what they experienced or learned.

In March we had two people represent us on the Palestinian delegation to the 60th annual session of The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN called Planet 50-50 by **2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality**. They attended and participated in many events as panelists and facilitators. One of the delegates Dima Hanania is a youth member of the Young Women Task Force.

In addition to hearing from our youth delegates, we have included a summary of the main events including the reports submitted by the UN and the Youth CSW Declaration on Gender Equality and the Human Rights of Young Women and Girls; the agreed upon agenda of themes for the coming years, and discussion about the new **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Both the World YWCA Council Meeting and the CSW have responded to the UN's newly developed SDGs. The SDGs clearly provide an opportunity for us to compliment existing international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UNSCR1325.

We are very pleased to see that the World YWCA Council and world governments have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and look forward to working with those goals that fit best with our work on women's empowerment and leadership development, economic justice, and peace building. The YWCA of Palestine has been working on both of these international resolutions for years.

Included in our report from the CSW are excerpts from Professor Dr. Haifa Al-Agha, Minister of Women's Affairs speech at the UN as she speaks eloquently and comprehensively about the achievements made here in Palestine with respect to gender equity and ending violence and the challenges we still face including this almost 50 year old military occupation and settler colonial policies that rob all of their freedom.

Finally, we are proud to include excerpts from interviews our delegation did while at the CSW. We have also decided to make a short video clip from these interviews along with pictures from New York so you can get a real sense of this important gathering on women's rights and gender equity.

## Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force

In the summer of 2015 the National YWCA of Palestine began to recruit and prepare for a youth led Peace and Justice Task Force with support from our Women's Advocacy Officer under our work on UNSCR 1325. The National Youth Coordinator at the National Council office Ms. Mayadah Tarazi, Office Manager and National Youth Coordinator at the National Council Office. In the fall she trained representatives from our four associations in how to develop a vision and mission statement with matching goals. The vision agreed upon is "A space where empowered youth empower" with a mission "to build a sustainable foundation of empowered youth leaders that influence the peace and justice decision making process."

Ms. Dima Hanania, member from Ramallah and delegate at the CSW had this to say about the Task Force as part of her panel presentation, *"Through the task force we strive to bring on a new generation of youth, both young men and women, to learn about the sustainable development goals and CEDAW, create awareness campaigns and provide workshops to university students, NGOs, and others. These youth members then become leaders in their communities and pass on their knowledge and recruit others to our mission in the task force."*

The Task Force is preparing a series of workshops and trainings to introduce the young women of local associations on YWCA priority issues and campaigns, which include UNSCR1325, BDS, and Stop Poverty Campaign. In addition, members of the Task Force were selected and trained to participate in international forums which have included the World YWCA Conference in Bangkok in October 2015 and the CSW in New York in March 2016.

In the summer they will meet with youth from the UK and Ireland for a Peace and Justice Task Force gathering to learn from each other how they can work on issues related to peace and justice.



## 28th World YWCA Council: Bold and Transformative Leadership Toward 2035

“By 2035, 100 million young women and girls transform power structures to create justice, gender equality and a world without violence and war; leading a sustainable YWCA movement, inclusive of all women.”

*Vision for the future from 28th YWCA Council*

The National YWCA of Palestine sent six delegates to Bangkok, Thailand to participate in the 28th Council and two observers. Under the direction and leadership of the National YWCA of Palestine, we sent three youth delegates who not only participated in the pre- Council Youth Forum but also participated in two workshops, one on UNSCR 1325: Understanding the Reality – The Story of Palestine and the other on Women's Rights for Freedom and Resistance Under Occupation Using BDS as a Tool. We partnered with Y Global for this last workshop. In addition, Ms. Suhair



Ramadan represented us on a panel with delegates from South Sudan and Sri Lanka and Y Global for a workshop titled, Women's Leadership in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building. She also participated in a workshop with YWCA of Canada in a workshop titled Women's Rights *at the Crossroads: Intersections and Intersectionalities*.

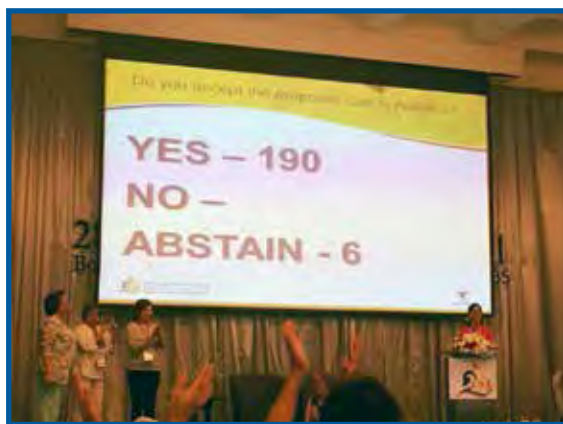
Our General Secretary, Ms. Mira Rizeq, who headed the delegation, worked hard in preparing the delegation for this Council meeting, and at the Council meeting took the lead in co-drafting the Call to Action for peace and justice in the Middle East, with special attention on Palestine to "support women's rights to resist and end all military occupation and the right of return for all refugees, and our commitment to advocate for the adherence of international human rights laws and the right of women, young women, and girls to live in dignity and freedom from violence and aggression."



During the World Council elections, Ms. Haifa Baramki, our President, was elected to the World Board as Vice President for the next four years. We are very proud to have her in the role.

Towards understanding our participation and the transformative nature of leadership development in our youth, we offer you these reflections from our General Secretary and our youth delegates.

## 1. Reflections on the 28th World YWCA Council Meeting: Call to Action National by General Secretary, Ms. Mira Rizeq



The World Council in Bangkok voted for the Call to Action titled: "Taking Action on Institution Human Rights Standards and Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East Region". As the largest women's ecumenical movement in the world, the plenary reaffirmed its commitment to women's rights to protection, safety and leadership on sustainable peace building based on justice. The plenary recognized that external and escalating military aggression and expanding foreign occupation of Palestine and other Middle East countries continue to threaten the safety and security of millions of families, women, and girls. The plenary affirmed its commitment to work as a movement to actively support Palestinian women's right to resist and end all military occupations, and affirmed the right for women to live in dignity, and freedom from violence and aggression.

For almost 50 years, the World YWCA has been vocal about the situation in the Middle East. In 1975, the World Council issued a resolution calling for Peace and Justice in Palestine and the Middle East. In 1983, the World YWCA recognized the rights of Palestinian people for statehood and reaffirmed its recognition that the PLO is the legitimate representative. It called for the halt of settlements and the establishment of a Palestinian state and called on all associations to do what they can to support this.



The World movement expressed its concern for Lebanon and confirmed the withdrawal of all foreign occupying forces and the sovereignty of Lebanon as a pre-requisite for peace and justice. This was further reaffirmed in 1987 at the World Council Meeting in Phoenix – Arizona. This council called for Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967, and urged the movement to work for a nuclear free Middle East, and encouraged the associations to continue to educate their members and to pressure their governments for a meaningful settlement for the whole region based on justice.

In Kenya, the resolution was drafted and brought forward to the plenary jointly by all YWCA's in the Middle East and the USA. Again, the resolution affirmed the need for safety, peace and security that will ensure that women can live in dignity and accomplish their dreams. In the last World Council meeting, the region affirmed the need to make violators of human rights accountable by bringing them to the national courts and the International Court of justice and the International Criminal Court. The resolution also affirmed the need for the formation and activation of the Global Peace and Justice Task Force as part of realizing human rights in the 2016-2019 strategic framework. This resolution was passed by a majority of 190 votes, and 6 abstentions.

Despite all these resolutions, the reality on the ground continues to deteriorate which calls for more strategic, collective and proactive action. The YWCA of Palestine is hoping to advance its work for peace and justice, and especially engaging more young women and joining all these national platforms which address UNSCR1325.

## 2. Reflections from Ms. Queen Masoud, YWCA of Ramallah Board Member, Member of Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force

“The most important thing I learned from those great people is that when you work together as one union you can feel strength and power all the way around.”



**Queen** is a youth board member of the Ramallah Association with over 4 years experience in this role. She has served as secretary and now is treasurer. In 2007 when she was 20, she was nominated to attend the 26th World Council in Kenya on behalf of YWCA of Jericho. In 2011 she was nominated again to attend the 27th World Council in Zurich. It was upon her return that the YWCA of Ramallah President Ms. Haifa Baramki encouraged her to join the Ramallah Association board as a youth member. In 2014 she was nominated to attend her 3rd Council meeting in Bangkok, Thailand.

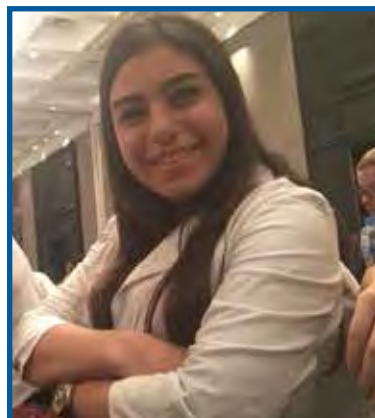
Queen participated in the pre-Council training with the YWCA of Palestine Peace and Justice Task Force. In reflecting on her preparations she started to see the connections between her work here and the work of the YWCA Movement:

*“I Started to deeply believe that this Association that I belong to was and will always be the place where we could start the Change, starting from ourselves to be much more empowered as young women until we carry that Change to the outside society through creating a safe space and place for women and especially young women to build their own future living their own vision.”*



### 3. Reflections from Ms. Christeen Darwish, YWCA of Jericho Board Member, member of Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force

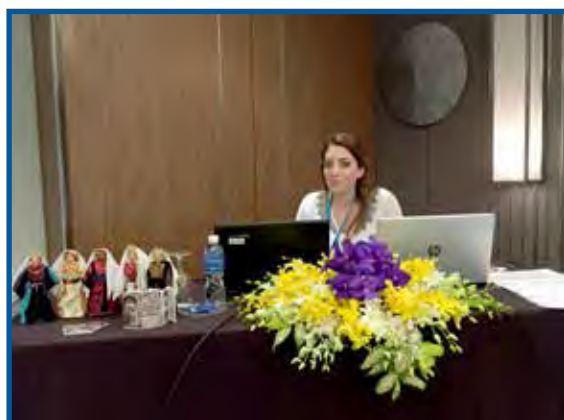
“My goal after this experience is to be committed for this great association which gave me and is giving all the young women opportunities to be leaders in their societies and eventually the whole World.”



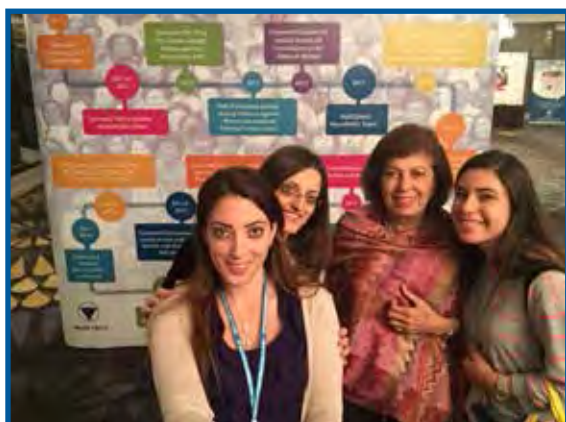
This was **Christeen's** first World Council and she was nervous about speaking in front of others but felt very supported by other members of the Palestinian delegation: “They were encouraging us in an incredible way...These women were pushing us (young women) to succeed and be leaders; they were not afraid we would take their place.” *Going to the World Council also gave her a better understanding of the association and its relationship to the Y Movement, “...I can say now I have a better understanding of the work of the association I belong to and made me more excited to participate and know my role and how I can contribute for the benefit of the YWCA of Palestine.”*

### 4. Reflections from Ms. Haneen Khalil, YWCA of Ramallah Board Member, member of Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force

“An additional asset to the World YWCA Council is that you get to know other independent states' problems and how you can help in solving their problems.”



This was Haneen's first World Council. She was very appreciative of the role of the elders in preparing and mentoring her for her role, “The most important and beautiful thing of the YWCA is that , even though I'm young and it was my first participation in a World Council, I did not feel alone.



The elders mentored us, and gave us all the space we needed to shine. We were able to ask them anything we wanted to, and learn from their experience. At the same time, they accepted our ideas, and built on them. Haneen participated in the workshop on UNSCR 1325 and spoke about its implementation in Palestine.

All three young women attended as part of the Young Women as Advocates for Peace and Justice Project with the YWCA of Ireland and the UK, a joint project for forging international partnership around peace and justice.



## 60th Session of the United Nations Commission on Status of Women



The National YWCA of Palestine has attended the CSW Session since 2011 as part of the World YWCA and on behalf of its own member Associations. This year we sent two delegates who participated in a number of side events. Ms. Suhair Ramadan, our Women's Advocacy officer and Ms. Dima Hania, board member of the Ramallah YWCA and Youth Task Force on Peace and Justice, who also was our youth delegate. She was a panel speaker and facilitator at a number of side events ranging from issues of violence and women's empowerment to issues on peace and its relationship to sustainable development goals.





## 1. Reports: Can We Move to Implementation?



“There is always a resolution at CSW on Palestine with baskets and baskets and baskets of resolutions on the Palestinian issue. What we need is the courage to implement these resolutions from our world leader. It is missing concreteness to move from continuous pronouncements to concrete implementation in translation of that intention.”

*From interview with Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda,  
General Secretary of Global YWCA*

### Grave Concerns

The report, issued for the 60th session of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women held March 14-24, highlighted the status of Palestinian women for the period from October 1, 2014, to September 30, 2015. The report said the Israeli occupation is to blame for domestic violence against Palestinian women. The Report cited that “Overcrowded living conditions and a lack of privacy” in Palestinian refugee camps causes psychological distress among camp residents, which combined with the unstable political and security situation and discriminatory gender stereotypes and norms, leads to this type of violence. Israel and the United States decried the report as biased and unjust. Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Mr. Danny Danyon even demanded that UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon revise the report.

The draft report for this year highlights different issues expressing its “grave concerns” over “all acts of violence, intimidation and provocation by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including children and women, and properties, including homes, mosques, churches, agricultural lands...” grave concerns over the “persisting disastrous humanitarian situation and socio-economic conditions in Gaza Strip..grave concerns that “Palestinian women and girls continue to be held in Israeli prisons or detention centers under harsh conditions...And the list goes on.

The report reaffirms that the “Israeli occupation remains the major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their advancement, self-reliance and integration in the development of their society, and stresses the importance of efforts to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and to ensure their equal participation and involvement in all efforts for the achievement, maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”

Ms. Linda Martinsen from Y-Global Norway in a recent interview also stated that in her opinion the final document is weak which she attributes to the need to come to consensus. She pointed out that the strength of issuing an updated report every year is in the process of negotiating what needs to be said. She stated. “the discussion during the negotiation are important for civil society” because it allows people to “clarify, push, and expose what is happening.”

Of particular interest to the YWCA of Palestine is the list of calls to act which include asking the international community to continue to provide assistance and continue to give attention to the promotion and protection of human rights. This list also includes a call to Israel to facilitate the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes and properties in compliance with relevant United Nations resolutions. We are glad to see the issue of refugees addressed.

The Draft Resolution looks very much like resolutions of past years perhaps with more details about increased violence. Though we are glad to see that this ongoing military occupation is listed again as a major obstacle to both peace and women's security and well being, we would like to see the call to action to include accountability by the international community. We were surprised and disappointed for example that there was no mention of the International Criminal Court especially in light of Israel's "Shoot to kill" policies or extrajudicial killings which are war crimes.



## 2. Session Outcomes Agreed Conclusions

The outcome of the Commission's consideration of the priority theme took the form of agreed conclusions which were negotiated by all Member States. First and most important was the fact that women's empowerment is linked to sustainable development.

A resolution on a "Multi-year Programme of Work for action by the Economic and Social Council was passed without a vote. A draft resolution on the "Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women", was voted on by a recorded vote (20 in favor to 2 against, with 11 abstentions), for action by the Economic and Social Council.

Other resolutions included a resolution on "Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned in armed conflicts"; taken without a vote and a resolution on "Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS", taken without a vote.

The Commission's multi-year program of work for the sixty-first, sixty-second and sixty-third sessions will be as follows:

### a. Sixty-first session (2017):

- Priority theme: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work;
- Review theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session);

### b. Sixty-second session (2018):

- Priority theme: challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls;
- Review theme: participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (agreed conclusions of the forty-seventh session);

### c. Sixty-third session (2019):

- Priority theme: social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Economic justice is an important thematic area and focus for our advocacy work so we are glad to see this focus reflected for the upcoming year. The National YWCA of Palestine and its associations has also made outreach to marginal communities a top priority and so is already reaching out to rural women and girls.

“ In order to achieve gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of ALL women, young women and girls, who are critical to achieving sustainable development, we must ensure non-discriminatory policies and laws in all communities and countries that protect: our legal identities; our self-determination; our mental and physical health; our autonomy over our own bodies and lives; our equality and dignity. ”

*Statement by the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) to the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women*



Our advocacy work is also connected to the World YMCA Council's list of global priorities. To help understand how these two frameworks operate here is an abbreviated list of the global priorities from the World Council matched with SDGs presented at the CSW. The YWCA of Palestine is particularly interested in SDG 4 and 5 and of course 16. Until the military occupation ends we must continue to focus on issues related to justice and peace as a top priority.



Global Priority	SDGSs
Sexual Reproduction and rights	SDG 3.7 & 3.3
Ensuring social, economic and justice	SDG 4
End violence against women, young women and girls	SDG 5.2
Eliminate and prevent all harmful practices including child, early & forced marriage	SDG 5.3
Economic empowerment & information Communication and technology	SDG 9
Ensure peace and justice	SDG 16
Ensuring faith & culture are not barriers to the implementation of women's rights	





### 3. 2016 Youth CSW Declaration on Gender Equality and the Human Rights of Young Women and Girls

Youth between the ages of 18-30 at the first ever youth forum met to discuss how gender equality would be implemented in all the SDGs. They join the United Nations in calling Member states to ensure “gender-just and youth-accountable implementation of the entire Agenda for Sustainable Development. Youth have expressed that they feel their voices have been marginalized and excluded from official CSW and SDG processes. They have asked for an annual Youth CSW Forum on Gender Equality and the Rights of Young Women as an integral component of the CSW and that youth are included in every high-level panel, side and parallel event at every CSW.



#### The Youth Forum recommended the following:

1. For the member states to incorporate the youth forum recommendations into the agreed conclusions during your deliberations.
  2. Create opportunities and Invest resources, political will and concrete support to young women and girls in achieving Gender Equality, which is key to SDGs.
  3. Ensure that all young women and girls have a voice and appropriate skills to enable them to make informed decisions, exercise their leadership and negotiate for access to services.
  4. We specifically call for action to end all forms of violence against young women and girls such as FGM, Child and Forced marriage among others and request for continued support to survivors of violence.
  5. We call upon ALL young men and boys to become our partners in achieving gender equality
- In conclusion, we request that you institutionalize the youth forum at CSW and adequately resource it as permanent. As leaders TODAY – the SDGs are about our lives NOW and our collective tomorrow. We stand with you in finding innovative and lasting solutions to achieve gender equality by 2030. We call upon all of you for becoming our partners in achieving a Planet 5050 by 2030.

HER STORY WAS CREATED NOW – I thank you!

Their list of goals and demands for achieving gender equality is impressive. They have tackled all the major issues from climate change to youth migration amidst global inequality. As an organization dedicated to youth and young women in particular, we were most pleased to participate in this forum. We are particularly interested in the theme of Young Women and Girls and Peace and Security and of course, “Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship”.

## 4. Isn't it Time?

*Isn't it time to put an end to injustice?*

*Isn't it time to dismantle this racist separation Wall?*

*Isn't it time to end this Israeli occupation?*

*Isn't it time to allow 6,000 prisoners in Israeli detention centers*

*to see the light of independence?*

*Isn't it time to end the largest and longest occupation in history?*



**Prof. Dr. Haifa Al-Agha**

Professor **Dr. Haifa Al-Agha**, Minister of Women's Affairs, gave a stirring five minute speech on behalf of the Palestinian delegation. Her speech highlighted the difficulties all Palestinians face living in the "harsh conditions of a military occupation and escalating violence." She stressed that "At a time when women all over the world are achieving progress advancing their social, economic, and political rights, the Palestinians are still living in harsh conditions due to the continued Israeli occupation and escalating violence against our people."

She said she wanted to raise a question mark, a red flag' and then asked the following: "Is it possible to be talking about empowering women with a continued Israeli policy, the occupying power, a policy of aggression and gross violations against their human rights, their confiscation of land, the demolitions of their homes, the destruction of the environment, discrimination and building of the racist wall?"

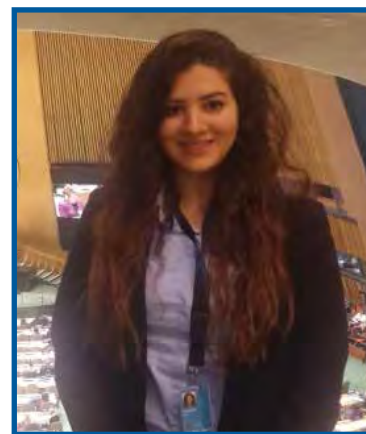
After her catalogue of violations she went on to say that despite these illegal policies and gross violations that women face in particular, there have been achievements including the setting of a strategic and national plan to advance the status of women that will lead to "empowering her to undertake her role in society". In addition, she highlighted the ratification of a new law that addresses violence in families and the passing of a number of laws that protect women in the work force. She also mentioned the updating of the new plan to implement UNCR1325 which the YWCA of Palestine has played a leading role in. Her conclusion restated what all CSW Commission Reports have said that, "The occupied State of Palestine is subject to Israeli policies and gross violations of the rights of Palestinian people that run counter to international laws and conventions."



## 5. From Our Interviews at the CSW

In addition to participating as panelists, presenters, and facilitators at the CSW our YWCA of Palestine delegation conducted a few interviews with members of the World YWCA about the SDGs and their relationship to Palestinian women. We also created a short video to accompany this part of our newsletter which you can find on youtube at

**A.** We begin with a short interview with **Ms. Dima Hanania**, our youth delegate talking about her experiences and why it is important that the YWCA of Palestine is represented at this event. “I believe YWCA’s representation there was of critical importance because I got to meet other youth, people on the ground, people from other NGOs, public sector, private sector, ministers, and even heads of state providing them with accurate information about who we are and what we do and how they can help us move closer to attaining gender equality. “ Dima also talked about the new Task Force during her panel talk in the Peace at the Frontline of the Sustainable Development Goals side event. “Through the Task Force we strive to bring a new generation of youth, both young men and women, to learn about the sustainable development goals and The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, to create campaigns and provide workshops to university students, NGOs, and others.



**Ms. Dima Hanania**

On the No Power, No Safety: Violence Prevention and Empowerment Panel she spoke about the violence in Palestine from the “conservative Arab society and the Israeli occupation.” In her talk about the occupation she spoke eloquently about how women are imprisoned illegally without trial and how there has been an increase in violence since October which includes the targeting of young women. She also shared that the National YWCA of Palestine is a strong implementer of UN Resolution 1325 which includes developing partnerships in peace building through programs that ensure dignified livelihoods for refugees and affected women.”



**B.** Our second interview was with the General Secretary of the World YWCA, **Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**, who began the interview by talking about how her visa process connected her to the Palestinian women: “I prioritized we needed to step up our work with peace and justice... It became clear from the moment I had to apply for my visa and I was told if I put my visa on my passport I would not be able to visit certain countries. I knew I had to take a decision to say if I have the visa stamped on my passport I have to go back to Zimbabwe to look for a new passport. But it was necessary. It was necessary for me to say yes I can go through the indignities, small indignities, knowing that my sisters and brothers are going through these indignities every day of their lives for the last seven decades.



**Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**

Just as we have been moved by her courageous commitment to keep the issue of peace in Palestine alive at the World Y level we were affirmed to hear her say, “I have been encouraged by their courage, the consistency, the seriousness with which the YWCA of Palestine has been working on peace issues from the every-day issues of our member associations to the economic empowerment of women. But also understanding our young women in Palestine are in difficult positions. “

Echoing Bishop Desmond Tutu about not being neutral in issues related to justice she said, “It is not easy and at the same time we cannot keep the silence because silence means indifference and silence means collusion and silence means lack of courage when a people are dying, when a people are bleeding, when a people are living under occupation. I therefore believe because I have also experienced in my own life that what you are talking about is not just a political issue. It is a basic issue of dignity and rights of individuals and people. Many are also outside of their own country and have no right of return or are displaced. And we have all heard of the situation in Gaza and the blockades, the compounded blockades, where even humanitarian assistance could not reach. The callousness of bombing a school. So in the face of such atrocities one cannot keep the silence, one must speak out and to be on the right side of justice and the right side of peace. It’s not about taking a political position. It’s about taking a position with humanity.”



**Ms. Aida Rehouma**

**C. Ms. Aida Rehouma** from Tunisia who is also the World YWCA Events and Projects Coordinator was our third interviewee. She spoke about the importance of holding one’s own government accountable. When asked about which of the SDGs were most important she answered: “I see two goals that are extremely relevant for us Arab women. I think one is Goal 16 around institutions around corruption, around accountability, and transparency. I think this is one of the things that does not play out in our favor. So the laws are there but then you have systems that are in place and regimes that are applying their own influence to it and we are allowing it because of the lack of transparency, lack of accountability. The fact that our own leaders and government leaders, if you ask them about SDGs, I am pretty sure, won’t know what you are talking about. “



**D.** We interviewed **Ms. Linda Martinsen** at our office while she was here with Y Global, the membership organization made up of the YMCA, the Scouts and YWCA of Norway. Y Global has worked with the YWCA of Palestine on a number of projects over the last 15 years so understands the context of life here very well. When asked about the intersection between the sustainable development goals and the rights of women here and whether this framework will be useful, she replied: “When it comes to NGOs, when it comes to civil society, the development goals are extremely important. It’s important that Israel has signed on. It is important that the Palestinian government is on board and that it is an international effort for gender equality and especially emphasizing this in each and every goal. When it comes to the possibility of the Palestinians getting these rights through their own government, it is not free to make its own decisions. So they are both kind of dependent on the Palestinian government as well as Israel to commend these changes. And then if the changes are to be done it must come from Palestinian women themselves of course but also international society.” Later when asked specifically whether UNSCR 1325 is a better framework she answered, “I think so. It gives more opportunities. It gives more possibilities. I think both locally and internationally because it speaks to the situation here better than the goals.”



**Ms. Linda Martinsen**



**Ms. Soraida Hussein**

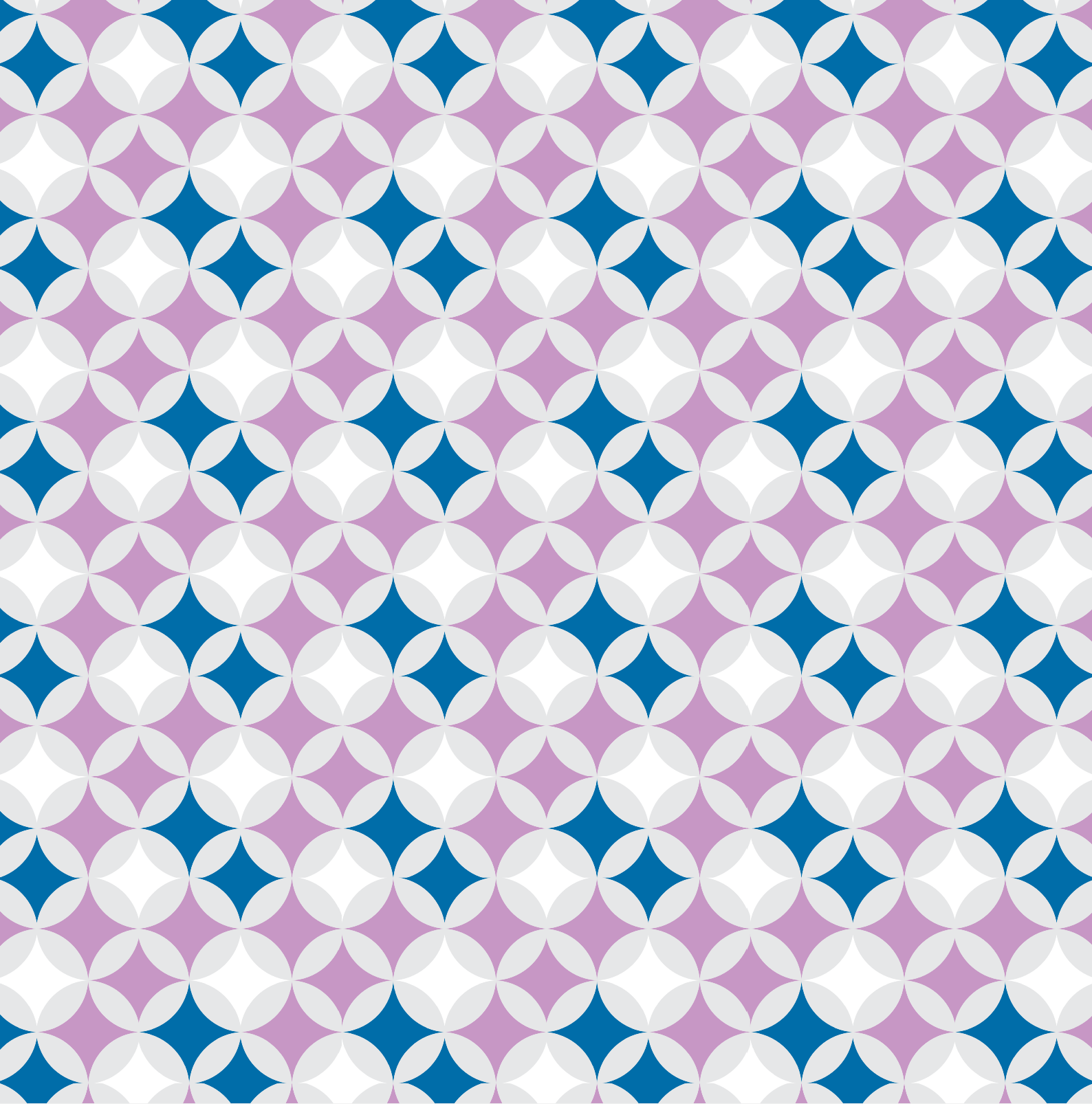
**E.** Our last speaker from the conference was **Ms. Soraida Hussein** from the Women’s Affairs Technical Committees. We did not get to interview her but were able to record her wonderful speech. In it she outlined how Palestinian women were at the forefront of the liberation movement from the British Mandate era to the present. “I am telling you Palestinian women ---we are in the front of the liberation of this occupation. This occupation is militarized.... It has a plan to take all Palestinians out of the land. As Women we are fighting for our right to our existence there and at the same time our right to have decent work and our rights.” Ms. Hussein also articulated a vision of the Palestine State that we applaud; “It’s a state that will have democratic laws). It is a state that will respect and protect women’s rights.”











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 **National YWCA of Palestine**

