

**“Who We Are”, Youth in the Refugee  
Camps of the Northern West Bank**

**The Lives of  
Young People in  
Their Own Words**





Bisan Center for Research and Development

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«من نحن» الشباب والشابات في مخيمات اللاجئين في شمال الضفة الغربية:  
حياتهم بكلماتهم

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يصدر هذا التقرير بالشراكة مع أوكسفام كيويك ويتمويل سخّي من  
الوكالة الكندية للتنمية الدولية (سيدا)

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ما يرد في هذا التقرير من آراء وأفكار يعبر عن وجهة نظر الشباب والشابات في مخيمات الشمال، ولا يعكس  
بالضرورة موقف مركز بيسان للبحوث والإنماء

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the youth in the Northern Refugee Camps, and not  
necessarily those of Bisan Center for Research and Development

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## **P**reface

In 2000, with bilateral funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through Oxfam-Québec, Bisan Center for Research and Development began the implementation of Neighborhood Corners Projects in six refugee camps in the north of the West Bank. The only comprehensive project of its kind in the area, this ongoing intervention targets women and youth in the refugee camps of Ein Beit Il Ma' (Camp No.1), Al-Faraa, Jenin, Nur Shams, Tulkarem, and Askar. The aims of this program were to strengthen local organizations serving these sectors, and encourage the leadership and participation of young people in their communities in these marginalized areas.

This document aims to offer and insight into the thoughts and lives of youth participating in the N.C. program. This compilation of youth voices is a result of Bisan's belief that appropriate programming for young people cannot occur without the active participation of the young people themselves, and that young people cannot participate effectively if their partners in designing programs are unaware of how they see their own lives. The stories in this collection represent a portion of the wide variety of opinions, concerns, experiences, hopes, and fears of young people in the six target refugee camps. Bisan believes that this document can provide information useful to the assessment of needs as well as the design of projects and programs for the target group. Bisan has already used information presented here to design future interventions in these areas, and we hope that others will do the same.



## Introduction

In 1948, approximately 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as a result of the creation of the State of Israel. Many of these took shelter in refugee camps which over the years, they have reluctantly begun to call home. As it became less and less likely that the refugees would be returning to their homes, the canvas tents and temporary shacks of initial flight were replaced with more permanent structures of concrete, asbestos, and tin. The West Bank camp residents who currently suffer the overcrowding and poverty of these same locales have lost their past in what is now Israel and are not well integrated into the local Palestinian society. Refugees make up approximately one third of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, though not all of them reside in the camps. While refugees remain one of the “Final Status Issues” unaddressed by the Oslo peace process with Israel, their current living conditions within the occupied Palestinian territories deserve to be investigated.

In 1949, the United Nations created a special agency to deal with the Palestinian refugees and administer services in the camps: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This agency, which is still responsible for providing direct services - education, health clinics, food distribution, and youth and women’s centers - within the Palestinian refugee camps throughout the Middle East, has no role in advocacy for the Palestinian refugees in the UN political arena unlike the organization’s general refugee agency, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Palestinian refugees are disadvantaged by the isolation of their unique relief agency, and UNRWA is increasingly without the necessary financial support to provide assistance and services that refugees have relied upon for over fifty years.

In the post-Oslo period (after 1993), refugee camps fell into a strange position. While the Palestinian Authority became responsible for the Palestinian areas of the West Bank, the camp services have remained the responsibility of UNRWA and local service committees (“Popular Committees”) are the official representative bodies of the camps. The land upon which the camps were established in some cases was and continues to be rented from local land owners. And while many Palestinians enjoyed prosperity in the post-Oslo period, camp residents continue to suffer discrimination from their countrymen, dilapidated, cramped, and often unsanitary conditions in the camps, and a general lack of social mobility. In the period of the second Intifada when local institutions are suffering from lack of funds, UNRWA is also unable to provide adequate relief and services. A new generation of young people is growing up in the camps trying to build a life in a context of conflict where few resources are available to them and at the same time to reconcile their identities as youth, Palestinians, and refugee camp residents.

There is a growing body of literature on youth in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some of it is statistical, other documents provide policy reviews and recommendations, and still others offer analysis based upon participatory research techniques, but the actual voices of youth are too often obscured, especially in print. This report is intended to reveal the voices of young people between the ages of sixteen and thirty, who are living in the refugee camps of the northern West Bank, as they grapple with the world around them: the occupation, their families, their friends, and their communities. We attempt to present the concerns, opinions, hopes, and experiences of young people in the northern camps as they expressed them with the hopes that through their own words, the youth can influence policy and decision makers about issues that affect them.

This report can be used as a reference against which to create or judge policy recommendations, project plans or other research studies. It is intended to be read in conjunction with such reports or proposals. It gives readers the

opportunity to catch a glimpse of the individual thoughts, responsibilities, roles, attitudes, challenges and triumphs of a group of young people to whom they might not otherwise have such intimate access. While some analysis is provided, the reader is left to draw his or her own conclusions and associations from the accounts presented. The accounts included here were mostly collected during the spring and early summer of 2003. The report captures the participant youth at a specific point in time, and it must be understood that while these youths' statements and stories do not represent all youth in camps in the northern West Bank, they can provide powerful insights into what youth believe and experience. Through examining these experiences of young refugees, we hope that both local and international governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned in development and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugee camps can provide more responsive and appropriate services.

### **The Report**

The first section of the body of this report is divided into topics of concern to the youth: housing, the economic situation, early marriage, education, values, inequality, and the relationships between the sexes, discrimination against refugees, the Israeli occupation, and projects and programs. Each topic is prefaced with a few remarks to provide a context for the reader, and then statements by the youth are presented. The topic categories emerged from recorded discussions, but they are not rigid or discrete, and one can easily perceive connections between them. In this portion of the report there is no effort to create consistent portraits of individuals; this is accomplished in the following section, "Stories". The section of the document entitled "Stories" is devoted to the results of in-depth interviews with a few young people who decided to share with the researchers their personal life stories in one-on-one interviews. We have tried to keep all translations as faithful as possible to the original and have not excluded many asides, or elaborations made by the youth in the interest of allowing the reader a chance to feel the tone of the individual speakers. In the next section of the introduction you will find a

brief overview of the camp characteristics, the youth participant contributors, and some examples of the structure of discussions that were held over the course of the research.

This report is part of a three year project of Bisan Center for Research International in conjunction with Oxfam Quebec and with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency. The target group of this project is predominantly young women and youth in Askar, Ein Beit Il Ma', Al Faraa, Jenin, Nur Shams, and Tulkarem refugee camps.

This publication is intended for a foreign audience interested in the issues that youth face in the refugee camps of the northern West Bank as part of policy decision-making. Some of the young people who contributed to this document revealed personal and family secrets, others spoke of things which might upset other people, or were concerned about possible punitive measures from the Israelis if their identities were revealed. We have avoided using names throughout the whole text so that it would be more difficult to link together any specific individual's identity and in order to be consistent. This is obviously not the case in the section on individual case studies.

If one notices an inequality of representation given to the different locations, one would be quite correct. This stems from the fact that during the period of this research, the political situation in the northern West Bank was anything but stable. The daily events greatly affected the mood of participants and researchers alike and influenced the content and productiveness of discussions. Often weeks passed between meetings in Al Faraa because of numerous cancellations of appointments. One time the army invaded the camp, another time the road was closed, a third the researcher was stuck for hours trying to cross a nearby checkpoint, and another time the camp was in mourning. In Jenin, the town or camp was so frequently under closure that meetings could hardly be scheduled at all. In one case the research team snuck out of Jenin by driving cross-country through fields and olive groves as clashes with the Israeli troops erupted in the center of the city. The meetings with young men were too short and not

substantial enough to draw any significant material. In Nur Shams young men were not available for extended interviews. In Tulkarem the closures, curfews, and nearly daily invasions by the Israelis made scheduling difficult as well. Tulkarem Camp is not represented in this study because it became simply too risky to visit the town. Miscommunications between the Israeli soldiers once found the researcher stopped by tanks on the main street for violating curfew while the troops at the checkpoint at the entrance to the town had said the town was open. Another time, a strict curfew was called unexpectedly in the middle of the afternoon and the team raced in chaos to find a safe route back to Nablus. It must be remembered that these difficulties are what the research team suffered with proper permission from the Israeli authorities, and coordination with the Israeli soldiers through an international agency - in other words, all privileges possible; it is nothing compared to what the interviewees would have had to undergo if they undertook such travel.

In different locations different relationships were built based upon the setting and the enthusiasm, interest, and temperament of the participants as well as the interaction of the team and the interviewees. Closer more trusting relationships often result in more in-depth discussion and personal revelations. The reader should note the geographic location of specific participants for a richer reading of the text, but should not weigh the representation of different areas as indicative of anything more than the unstable political situation.

Please note that all amounts are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise specified.

## **Methodology and Approach**

The research team consisted of the head researcher, six camp animators responsible for on site logistical arrangements for the research activities, the Bisan program manager for the CIDA-funded project, and an occasional translator who helped to launch the research processes in Arabic. The research consisted of focus groups in each accessible region with women and men, then the open opportunity for the youth to participate in further discussions

individually or collectively. In some cases the youth also conducted tours for the team of their communities to provide more context for their stories, and in a couple of cases, research team members were invited into participant's houses to meet and talk with their families. The format for focus groups and interviews was flexible depending upon the issues with which the youth were concerned and their comfort-level with the process. Guiding questions included young people's understanding of what "youth" means; what it means to be a refugee in contemporary Palestinian society, and the major concerns for themselves and their families, and their ideas for solutions to community problems.

In implementing any qualitative project, the most important initial step is to determine one's method of contact or entry into a community; this sets the tone for future interactions and helps to determine with whom you are most easily able to talk in the community. We chose to approach each camp through the local Bisan project animators. Bisan has been implementing activities with these animators in the local partner centers, and youth were quite willing to participate in the study because they had already identified Bisan as having facilitated enjoyable and beneficial local training courses. After outlining the research purpose and explaining how we were interested in conducting focus and discussion groups with young people, the animators gathered young people to participate. In all cases but Askar refugee camp separate meetings had to be held for males and females out of respect for local social norms.

At the first meeting with the youth, the research project was discussed and the uses and importance of cases studies explored. General discussions were commenced either around proposed topics or on the topics of the youths' interest depending upon the context. As themes emerged these were pursued, as were points of discord among the youth. These general conversations were the foundations upon which levels of intimacy and trust were built within the group and between the researcher and the group and its individual members. When we completed our first session, we informed the youth that we were interested in continuing discussions with them. Sometimes groups would request future

group interviews, taking comfort in their numbers to give them confidence to talk about personal experiences. In other instances we would be approached by individuals who requested private interviews so that they could broach more sensitive topics. In all group discussions, a verbal agreement was reached with all participants that nothing discussed during the sessions should be discussed with people who were not participating in the sessions and that individual's privacy and sensitivities should be respected. Despite the sensitive nature of the discussions we were never aware of any discomfort experienced by any of the participants due to our interviews or discussions. The youth were eager to find a sympathetic audience interested in hearing their views and taking them seriously. The youth gave the researchers tours of their camps to further illustrate local living conditions. Discussions groups were mainly held in local community centers. Interviews were conducted wherever the interviewee felt comfortable. In many cases interviewees preferred not to meet in their homes because of the lack of privacy. Interviews were tape recorded when appropriate and copious notes were taken at all meetings.

The researcher subsequently compiled the notes, and translated and transcribed the tapes. When necessary or possible, the researcher would consult the individual contributor or local animator to clarify issues that arose in the development of the report. Themes were identified and quotations chosen with which to illustrate them. Criteria for choosing illustrative quotations varied. They were chosen to demonstrate conflicting opinions, show similarities in experience, to give voice to an original thought or an imaginative or vivid image, and sometimes to relay the rich use of language of many of the young people. Some individual stories were chosen and are presented as complete narratives for impact. In all cases we have assumed that the youth themselves are the experts on their own situation, and our job is simply to organize their thoughts into a collective, coherent and presentable format. The young people who participated in this study put much effort into making sure we understood and represent their lives thoroughly and accurately; we hope we have done them justice and we also hope that in future they will have the opportunity to represent themselves.

## **The Camps and the Local Participants**

In this section we attempt to provide a picture of the camps and an overview of the participants in this study. We also try to give a sense of the main flow of conversation with some of the groups. It must be remembered that while the study was initially meant to incorporate young people of both sexes from each camp, this was rendered impossible by the political situation.

### **ASKAR**

#### **The Camp<sup>1</sup>**

Askar was established in 1950 on 209 dunums<sup>2</sup> of land within Nablus, an additional contiguous 90 dunums was added fourteen years later. This neighbourhood of “New Askar” falls outside of Area A, or the areas under total Palestinian control. The whole camp houses nearly 14,000 refugees. Located in the east of Nablus, it has repeatedly been cut off from Nablus city center for long periods of time by a ‘floating’ Israeli checkpoint intended to keep camp residents of Askar and neighbouring Balata Camp from entering the city. The camp is spacious but does have problems of overcrowding. There are numerous centers and organizations in and around the camp which are active to varying degrees. Most meetings for this report took place in either the Women’s Activity Center or the Youth Center in Askar Camp. Askar was the only locale where meetings consisted of both young men and women.

Participants included:

- ◆ A 23-year-old young woman with a bachelor’s degree in accounting who has three people in her household. She is involved in many activities and holds responsible and employed part-time positions in a number of local organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> All figures for the camps are taken from the UNRWA website at [www.un.org/unrwa/](http://www.un.org/unrwa/).

<sup>2</sup> One dunum is equivalent to approximately 1,000 square meters.

- ◆ A 17-year-old young man who is in his first year of high school with six people in his family. He enjoys playing the *oud* (lute).
- ◆ A 29-year-old second year student at Al Quds Open University with eleven people in his household.
- ◆ A 27-year old young man who does interior decorating and paints houses.
- ◆ A 25-year old teacher who lives at home with his parents and plays music.
- ◆ A 22-year old young man who is in a vocational training program and works for the Palestinian Authority.
- ◆ A 21-year old young woman who works in the women's center and lives at home with 11 other people.
- ◆ A 25-year old with a bachelor's degree in physical education who shares a house with eight family members.
- ◆ A young man who works in a restaurant.
- ◆ A young woman who finished her *tawjihi* (high school matriculation examinations) and now has a job. There are fifteen people in her household.
- ◆ A young woman whose father works abroad and who lives with her mother and four siblings. She has finished a two year diploma.

## **EIN BEIT IL MA'**

### **The Camp:**

Ein Beit Il Ma', also known as Camp No. 1, is located within the city of Nablus. Established in 1950 on 45 dunums of land the camp has three distinct neighbourhoods: upper middle and lower. With 6,221 registered residents the camp suffers some of the worst overcrowding. While often poverty is hard to see in Palestinian society, it is palpable here. In the lower part of the camp which is separated from the rest of the camp by a main road, there are no centers or services.

The walls of the slim damp alleys between houses in many places met overhead and in some places one has to bend slightly to pass under low constructions. The young women took us to a small courtyard of maybe 6 square meters off one of these alleys. Overlooking the courtyard was a weathered building with an outside staircase and balcony, two doors downstairs and two doors upstairs. Behind each of those four doors, they explained were families in one or two rooms, large families. And they all shared one small water closet in the courtyard with a tap outside it. The young women noted that this was one of the few instances where they could show us where the poverty rampant in the camp is evident from the street.

The camp has an active Women's Center and a Youth Center. The Youth Center, despite its impressive building with numerous classrooms, halls, and new computer center, does not currently support any activities. The Women's Center houses a library, computer center, and beauty technicians training salon. The Center runs activities for women and children and is in the midst of negotiating ways for young men to take advantage of some of their facilities as well. The Youth Center traditionally serves only young men. The building however houses the 'Ein Beit Il Ma' University Students' Council, which is a voluntary organization which among other things launched an after-school program for disadvantaged children from the camp. This effort was funded by the UNDP for a short time, but the Council is hoping to find more permanent resources to sustain it. Many of the young people involved in this research are active members of the Students' Council.

### **Young Women**

There were five young women who were involved in the interviews for this project. Because of the camp's accessible location and their enthusiasm, these interviews and discussions were the most drawn-out of the project. To give an idea of the women who participated we give the following profiles:

- ◆ A 19-year-old young woman who was studying for the *tawjihi* examination. She was supposed to have taken her exams in 2002, but in April and May of that year the Israelis conducted series of major invasions into the area and

she was not prepared to sit for the examines in June. She is not allowed to go back to school by her family because the high school is far away. She is studying at home and hopes to pass her exams this spring with tutoring help in English. She wants to study social work. She likes working with the disabled and dreams of opening a center for the disabled in the future. She lives with her sisters and brothers and is without a father or mother. She is the fourth girl. There are nine children in the house all together. Only one of her siblings is married and they all live together. She lives in the middle of the camp. She likes living there because the families are very close. “Though they are not family”, she says, “The neighbours are like family. Every day we are in and out of each others’ houses, and if one of us cooks something delicious, we always share it. We stay up late together, sometimes until twelve, sometimes sitting on the roof, eating sun-flower seeds and talking.”

- ◆ An 18-year-old young woman who lives in upper Ein Beit Il Ma’ where she says the neighbours don’t care about each other, and houses are farther apart. She studies beauty at the Women’s Center. She describes her family in the following way: “There are five children, four girls and one boy. I take courses at the Women’s Center when there are some, but otherwise I stay at home. I was engaged at 15, but it didn’t work out. I left school when I got engaged and never went back.”
- ◆ A 17-year-old young woman in whose house there are four boys and three girls. She is the youngest. She received a certificate in beauty from the women’s center last year. She finished eleventh grade but didn’t continue. She says it is impossible for her to continue, but will not elaborate. She considers herself a poet and writes poetry for herself but not for anyone else to see. When pressed she says the poetry is about national things, and Palestine, and then blushes and says and love of course. She has one married brother and one sister in the university. Halfway through our sessions, she stopped attending the weekly meetings. Her friends said that her mother had forbidden her. The research team went to visit her mother to explain the project and see whether they could sway her decision. She had sent word

with the other girls that she wanted to come to the focus groups. During the meeting her mother was friendly and said she thought the program sounded interesting but she had made her decision and would not change it. She said that her decision had nothing to do with the program itself or the other people involved. She mentioned the (short) walk to the center as inappropriate for an unmarried girl. We offered to pick her daughter up at the house and return her after the sessions, but she still refused. The young woman was upset to be cut off from her friends. Throughout the meeting, the mother was holding a young grandniece. At one point she looked down at the baby in her arms and said “This one, this little girl, you I am not letting out of my sight. As soon as you know how to walk I am locking the door and not letting you pass it until the day you get married. I won’t even let you go to school.”

- ◆ An energetic 20-year-old young woman who left school the first year of high school. She wants to study *tawjihi* however and to get a degree in guidance or counseling. There are nineteen people living in her house. There are six sisters and four brothers, some married and with children. She is the next to the last one. She has a disabled sister and another one who studies in the university. Her father is a pharmacist. Her mother works in the house. She has one brother who cannot walk well because he was wounded with a bullet in his leg, and another brother is chronically ill but has not been accurately diagnosed.
- ◆ A 23-year-old young woman who graduated with a degree in accounting and helps to support her family in the camps by working in a gold jewelry factory doing manual work.

### **Young Men:**

The young men who participated in the discussions in Ein Beit Il Ma’ were all involved with the University Students’ Council. In over five meetings their numbers ranged from four to sixteen participants. The young men provided some of the most detailed accounts of their lives and examples of these can be found in the section on youth stories below. While the young men participated enthusiastically in group discussions,

they were not as forthcoming about their personal information. Mostly a bit older than the young women, and close friends and colleagues, let it suffice to say here that all of them were trying to pursue their university education, whether currently enrolled in classes or looking for funds to register for the following term.

## **AL FARAA**

### **The Camp:**

Al Faraa Camp is located among rolling hills on the edge of the Jordan valley, seventeen miles from Nablus by direct road and a few kilometers from the large village of Toubas. Created on 255 dunums of farming land rented from a local resident of the nearby village, the camp is surrounded by fields and olive groves and houses nearly 7,000 refugees. In the patchwork quilt of fields, the crowded camp makes an odd square, a solid island of modest cement buildings, built as they say, so that you only need three walls not four, because you build against your neighbour's wall. The second Intifada has not only left the camp residents cut off from possible jobs in Israel, it has left them isolated from any nearby towns or services. The seventeen kilometers to Nablus have become half a day's treacherous journey which required several kilometers on foot. The road to Jenin is blocked to them and at many times there are Israeli checkpoints near the entrances of the camp. At the time of the interviews, the well looked after Women's Center of the Camp was active installing a library and undertaking a number of activities with a willing core of committed volunteers and animators. The Youth Center was less coordinated and at that time lacking a location as their center was temporarily housing classes from the local elementary school. Both centers appear to draw young people from all sectors of the camp.

### **Young Women**

The twelve young women who made up this group are as follows:

- ◆ Two 19-year-old university students, one studying social sciences who would like to work in community development when she graduates, and the other studies elementary education.

- ◆ Three 24-year-old women, and three other women, 18, 21, and 22 years old, who are all at home - it is not clear if they are all married or not.
- ◆ A 23-year-old woman who works in a clothing shop, and a 20 year old who finished *tawjihi* and wants to work in the Women's Center library.
- ◆ A 21-year-old woman who is currently a student and would also like to work in development on some level, and a 25-year-old woman who is married and has finished university.

The young women all expressed a great eagerness to learn. They had dreams for their futures. They see problems in their society and want to change some things. They all want greater respect between the sexes. They defined youth as a period of increasing open-mindedness and growing responsibility and a time when young women begin to care about themselves more and have more awareness about their culture. They complained that there was no working center for young people and no outside support for children in their studies or for special needs students. They voiced concern that local summer camps for children are limited to a certain number of children and that they cost money. They all remarked that as young women they had lots of free time and little to do. They wished there were summer camps for women. Early marriage is a big problem in their opinion for both men and women in the camp. They are sad that there is no garden or park in the camp, or any place for kids to play. They say that they all feel restricted to different degrees by the society. They cannot come and go as they please. They would like to have opportunities to make some money through their hobbies such as handicrafts, but they acknowledge that there is no market available to them. They say that overall their education is quite good, but they need to be stronger in English, especially conversation. They would very much like to take a short trip somewhere out of the camp.

### **Young Men**

The young men did not reveal their ages but the group consisted of the following eight individuals: a volunteer leader of scouts who is active in the community,

two high school students, three unemployed laborers, an electrician, and a young man who works for UNRWA.

As in many of the discussions, we started out defining what they meant by youth since the interviews and focus groups were to be centered on youth issues. One said “from the time I was 12 until my death I plan to be a youth, at least in spirit”. Another said “when a man has children he changes. He is no longer a young man”. A third young man silenced the conversation by saying; “For my whole life as a youth, from the time I was 17 I have not lived as I should, this is not youth”. There was a general nodding of heads in agreement. The youth club has been closed. There is no money for programs, there are no trainers. The youth all said they have serious worries, “We worry about unemployment, our financial situations, and our security.”

There was general agreement that as refugee camp residents they were discriminated against by local townspeople and villagers. They wished there could be more communal feeling between them. One said “Everyone needs equipment; the area has to work together. Not only the camp has to work together, but the villages around here have to work with us. They don’t work with us. We have no influence or standing in the villages. Who benefits? Them [the villagers]. We have lots of water; there is a spring nearby. We could have a swimming pool, learn how to swim, or build a volleyball court. We even have a karate trainer in the camp. He is really good. And he is willing to train us. But we have no money to pay him. And we have no place we could have the lessons. We are very impressed with the new library in the women’s center here in the camp, but we are afraid we are not able to use it [because we are male]. What little resources there are, we have to work together to share them with everyone.” The young men had many ideas for programs, the most popular ideas which are elaborated in the “Projects” section of this document and elsewhere are to create a vocational training center in the camp, to hold a survey of the camp to understand its real needs and to sponsor *tawjihi* classes open to all who are taking to the exam.

While they had lots of ideas, they generally agreed with one young man who acknowledged that the spirit in the camp is flagging; “Everyone is depressed. We don’t even have much volunteer work. People don’t have enough to give.”

The young men were unusually frank considering the dialogue took place over only one afternoon. When one of the young men said “We need encouragement. Someone to encourage us”, another continued, “Yes, counseling” and a third elaborated in agreement, “Someone who follows us, who supports us morally, emotionally, and ... economically”. Young men often carry a lot of responsibility on their shoulders and consider it inappropriate to their sex to betray weakness or dependence. These young men were quite enthusiastically reaching out and asking for help.

## **JENIN**

### **The Camp**

Jenin Camp, which lies to the west of the green line city of Jenin, holds about 14,000 refugees. This camp has been the site of some of the worst Israeli invasions of the second Intifada and has suffered heavy casualties, damages, demolitions and arrests in addition to some of the longest curfews. Though located near the city center, many young people remarked that because of the distance and lack of security they could not participate in activities there. They said there were few activities in the camp for children or youth. We met twice with women from the Women’s Center in Jenin Camp. The Center at that time was located in temporary quarters in a large hall with a stage at one end, a few old school chairs and tables. In all eight women participated in the discussion. Two workshops were attempted with young men from the camp in the local campus of Al Quds Open University.

### **The Young Women**

One woman is 25 years old is married with three children. She has been married for seven or eight years. Her husband works as a mechanic. Another is 29 years

old, married and stays in the house. A third is 25 years old and works with the disabled in the camp. Two young women were 16 years old, one in school, and one at home. Two women worked as social workers, one 23 and the other 30. And one 20 year old young woman was studying at Al Quds Open University.

### **TULKAREM**

The Tulkarem camp that takes its name from the town in which it is located is the second largest camp in the West Bank after Balata. The camp houses 16,259 refugees. While we were unable to conduct interviews with the young people in this camp because of the political situation, the interviews with the psychologist working in this camp can give a few glimpses into its situation.

### **NUR SHAMS**

#### **The Camp**

Nur Shams camp lies on 266 dunums on the outskirts of the town of Tulkarem, three kilometers to the east. It houses over 8,100 refugees. The camp streets are neat and clean. On a hillside facing north and west, the camp enjoys more views, air, and light than some of the other camps. As the camp is on the edges of the town, there is some room for expansion and some camp residents can afford to buy parcels of land near the camp to build upon. The camp is on the old road to Nablus. Before the second Intifada began, Nablus was a short quarter of an hour's drive. Now the road is closed and the previously oft used thoroughfare below the camp is quiet. The camp has been repeatedly cut off from the town during the past three years.

#### **The Young Women**

We met in the Women's Center which is around the corner from the UNRWA offices and a central square and market of the camp. The women's center is abuzz with activity with small children clapping and singing in one of the main rooms, a group of young women gathering for a cosmetology lesson in another

room, and the office crowded with women of all ages drinking coffee and exchanging news.

The Nur Shams interviews included some of the youngest participants in the project. The eight young women who participated in this discussion group can be identified as follows: a 15 year old girl who was in ninth grade, and three 16 year old girls in tenth grade, a first year student at Al Quds Open University who wants to major in English, a young woman who completed 11th grade before she married, a 23 year old woman who finished her *tawjihi* and is now staying at home, and a 30 year old woman who finished *tawjihi* and runs a nursery school in her home. Her first husband was killed and she has recently remarried.

The group agreed that young men and women have to work together to build a future for their society and that youth play a critical role in their communities, but that there is little support given to young people who want to be involved. They decided in a discussion that being 17 - 19 years old is the most difficult time in a young person's life, because it is the time they leave off being children and move away from being so dependent on their parents and begin to hold their own opinions and make their own choices. They qualified this statement, emphasizing that this did not however mean that youth were necessarily in control at this age. Many of their parents still had control over them. They defined youth as being a precarious period when one gains responsibility, but before one takes on all the burdens of adult life. They emphasized that this is the age at which your personality is really developed and you can stand up for yourself and live your own life internally at least even if you are at odds with your parents, husband, or your mother-in-law.

The young women agreed that one could feel old at 18 and young at 60. One young woman said that because of the political situation, "though we are in the prime of our youth we feel like old women". Like others, the young women complained about the lack of freedom of movement, even to the center of Tulkarem where the high school is. They spoke a lot about the effect of the occupation on their studies.

## The Issues

The quotations in each section below are grouped by speaker, so assume that two quotes originating in the same camp are not by the same people. Just about everyone who participated in the discussions has been quoted in some form in this document. There was one social worker and one psychologist interviewed for this collection. Though both are young people themselves and have worked extensively with refugees in the camps, neither are from the refugee camps. We have included their insights with the testimonies here because we think that their statements are powerful and they put some of the comments made by youth into perspective. We have been clear to note their professional roles in the credits for the quotations.

### **Housing in the camps**

The refugee camps differ in density. Askar and Nur Shams camps have more available space for expansion than Ein Beit Il Ma', Al Faraa' or Tulkarem Camps. In Jenin the problem of overcrowding was not mentioned as an issue. This does not mean that it is not a problem, but it may have been overshadowed by more timely discussions of the effects of the occupation upon the camp. Within each camp, there are neighbourhoods. Some are more crowded or densely built than others. It should be remembered that Palestinian camps, especially in Gaza, are some of the most densely populated areas in the world. When a young man in a family gets married, he and his new family usually occupy an existing room in his father's house. Or they build an additional room to live in. Houses can expand quite rapidly if a family has many sons who remain in the camp. Construction is relatively inexpensive and simple;

mostly out of concrete, labour is often carried out by family members. While poverty plays a large role in causing overcrowding in the camps, it must be remembered that the effects of this overcrowding have been magnified greatly by the current Intifada and Israeli's operations in the areas of the West Bank. With limited freedom of movement, diminished opportunities for recreation, high unemployment, and general fear, more people are confined to their houses which, as the youth point out, greatly increases the pressure on everyone in the household. The youth spoke extensively, not only about the lack of housing available to them both in and outside of the camp, but also the problems that arise for them as youth because of the over-crowded living conditions: lack of personal space, lack of privacy, and health concerns. As evident in these statements, the lack of housing affects the dignity as well as health and well being of the camp residents. Not all youth share the same problems but there is resonance between the camps' issues despite their differences.

*“In my house we have six people in two rooms. How am I supposed to study if in the next 100 meters from our door there are twenty more houses and many more households filled with people talking? When we have guests, how can I study? There is no place. Where can I go? The street? And on top of that, there is no place for the children to go to play so the house is always filled with children running around. And if the children are not in the house they are in the alleys between the houses which are narrow and their voices echo.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“Housing is a problem, and so is space in which to gather or play. Children play in the main streets between the cars which is dangerous. And in search of a quiet space in which to study, many students take their school or university books to the mosque.” - Social worker in the refugee camps, Nablus*

*“We have problems with housing. Nothing can be over 3 stories high in the camp. And we pay the rent [for the land] not*

*UNRWA. We are really overcrowded. Too many people living in one or two rooms.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“We live in one room. If I get married, I will live in this room with my children and my children’s children if I have to. But I will try to add another room to my parent’s house. Maybe 500 Jordanian Dinars [\$1,000] will build me a good room.”  
- Young man, Askar*

*“Our problem with housing is much less than in Camp No.1 [Ein Beit Il Ma’]. They have only one street in their camp. We have wider streets. Our housing problem is maybe 30% of their problem. But in maybe ten years it will be a big problem for us. Will we be alive in 10 years? 10 months? 10 days?” - Young woman, Askar*

*“You know everything that is going on in the houses. You hear your neighbours arguing; you hear which television shows they are watching. Studying is difficult. The cramped space also gives us personal problems. There is no privacy. There is always some member of your family in your face. There are no secrets and there is no personal freedom”. - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“I can’t go onto the roof in my shorts. I can’t do anything on my roof without telling my neighbours that I am going to be working on the roof. I overlook all my neighbours’ roofs and they overlook my roof. My neighbours on the other side of the wall, if he quarrels with his wife, I hear him. Even if he is speaking to his son I can hear his voice. I shut them all out. When I go into my room I turn on my tape recorder so I don’t hear my neighbours or my father or my mother or my grandmother. [The walls are so thin] I can enjoy two television programs simultaneously, one in my house and*

*the one on next door. One with the picture and one with only sound. - Young man, Askar*

*“In many houses there is a problem of space because more than one family shares the same apartment. They cannot separate the families nor can they separate the girls from the boys even. When the girls get to be sixteen or seventeen this becomes a big problem. Maybe a young man and a young woman in the same house fall in love, this is also a problem. Because there is no space, I know more than one young man who has to sleep in the kitchen at night.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“Maybe 96 or 95 percent of the residents of camp don’t feel free in their own homes. No one can feel free in their own house. For example, I can’t open a window - if I am lucky enough to have a window. I can’t open the window at night, not because my neighbour is evil but if my wife is in the room and my neighbour is standing on his veranda her privacy will be invaded. Watching television at night I can’t make it loud because my neighbour would have to hear it”. - Young man, Askar*

*“When someone dies, some of the alleys of the camp are so narrow that they have to carry the body over the rooftops because the stretcher and procession will not fit around the corners in the alleys. Once there was an old lady whose heater caught on fire and her house was burning. Before anyone could reach her from the fire department, she died. It is the same thing for ambulances. No emergency services can reach most of the houses in the camp”. - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“The winters are cold and the summers are hot. And there are many mice and rats which live between and among the houses. You can hear them in the walls.” - Young man, Askar*

*“You know the camp is built on a hill and the water comes down the hill and seeps into the houses and especially in the bottom of the camp where the water gathers it comes in through roof, the walls, and the floor. Since everyone’s house is three walls built against their neighbours’ walls, if there is a leak, sometimes one visits four houses before one finds the origin of the leak and devises a solution to fix it” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“The houses are not healthy themselves. There are many houses where sun cannot reach into the houses at all”. - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“We had a problem; the neighbour was keeping goats and sheep on the roof. And one day it came down the stairs and into the house, the sheep I mean. And this poor ewe was not well. And it went around dirtying everything and created a problem - shall we say a very widespread problem. This lead to some misunderstanding between neighbours, all because of the sheep. The roofs are used for raising pigeons, chickens, poultry, and sheep. It’s not usual to have cattle up there. There is another problem, a health problem the alleyways between the houses are very narrow and the sewage runs down the middle of them and sometimes, well, the volume is great. There are too many people living on top of each other. As families grow they build one and two and three extra stories all on the same absence of plumbing. When you have three stories you have indoor plumbing, where there are pipes it is built into the walls and when it breaks it is very difficult to get at. When it rains or when there is a problem there is flooding. And it is not clean. All camps are like this and have these problems. It is crowded; to have a gap of 10cm [between houses] is a luxury. Most houses share walls. Seventy percent of the rooms in the camp are not*

*really healthy environments, especially those on the ground floor. Especially for small children”. - Young man, Askar*

*“Sometimes people keep sheep and goats in the middle of the camp. It’s unhealthy. The sheep sometimes bring us diseases. And also with the number of people in the camp living so close together diseases spread very quickly. Once there was an amoeba in the camp and every child almost in the whole camp was affected and sick. My aunt died from something carried by the sheep. And my nephew and little cousin have lumps on their necks from this unhealthy environment.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“There is a problem with light in all the refugee camps. The ground floor gets very little light. You have to use electricity day and night. The houses are four meters by fourteen maybe but they are filled with people. In short, overcrowding is very high. These people, refugees, came from the nicest places in the world, from paradise, and then they find themselves in such conditions. Recently our grandfathers were telling us how they fled with what they could grab, - can we blame them? - and now the Lod airport [Ben Gurion] is on the land that used to belong to my grandfather”. - Young man, Askar*

*“The problems with housing affect the people of the camp in terms of their health as well as psychologically. There are many problems, inside the houses and within the families or with the neighbours. There is a problem. There is illness, even if there is a cure, it doesn’t matter and diseases get worse”. - Young man, Nur Shams*

*“All the dirt in the town [Tulkarem] passes our camp. There is this place called Wadi Zomer across from the camp. It smells. The smell makes everyone feel sick. And then they dump the*

*waste from the olive oil production there and it really makes everyone sick. It is wet there and the sewage collects. There are lots of mosquitoes that come from this place as well. We don't think the water is clean.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

### **The Economic Situation**

The Palestinian economy has been strangled during the second Intifada. Strict closures hinder and prevent the export of Palestinian goods or the transport of goods between towns or the countryside and the urban centers. This harms the agricultural market as well as manufacturing and industry. Israeli goods can pass the checkpoints into Palestinian areas more easily making Palestinians increasingly dependent upon them. In addition, these goods are often quite inexpensive making them more attractive. The closures have prevented most Palestinians from working in Israel. Many refugees have relied on such work for years as their mainstay. The country is now sinking into over 50% unemployment, underemployment is high, and Palestinians are well on the road to suffering from a level of entrenched poverty that will be very different to recover from. The growing poverty is only beginning to be more visible and recent studies are showing alarming rates of malnutrition among children. While there is widespread reliance upon relatives to provide social security and support poorer relations, fewer and fewer people are capable of offering such support. And this kind of support is difficult to sustain over long periods of time. Youth suffer from being unable to compete to find jobs because they have few years, if any, of experience. If youth have jobs, they live in danger of being let go because of the failing economy. When they do find jobs, they are often not in their specialty, or they are chosen because they will not demand high pay. Young women are often encouraged to marry early to save their parents the costs of educating them, their education is more often terminated for these reasons as well, and youth male and female are feeling the burden of having to contribute to put food on their families' table, whether for their parents or their spouses and children or both. This pressure, coupled with the lack of spare money for

recreation, has left many young people interviewed feeling as though they have lost their youth. Here are some of their comments about poverty and the economic situation:

*“There is no local market, no local work, and no money. All the money goes. There is no money to pay for electricity and water, though now vegetables and fruit are almost free.<sup>3</sup> People used to come from Hebron to buy the local produce here. Now there is nothing.”* - Young man, Al Faraa

*“We are far away from a city. There is no work. There is great discrimination here. The people from [ the neighbouring village of ] Toubas look down on us. They don't hire us for jobs. This land [of the camp] is rented from them so they feel they are better than we are. We used to work in Israel. Maybe we would earn 50, 100, shekels<sup>4</sup> or more to work from 6am until 12pm. Now if we want work from the people in Toubas, we earn maybe 40 shekels for working from 6am until 5pm. There are no labour laws. We take what we can get. We don't get taken care of. No Chamber of Commerce cares for us. The support that comes here doesn't reach here. It doesn't reach us. The councils don't get to the people. Families can't live on the things they are given. And even then the help is not for everyone. We are 6,500 here. Maybe there is only really aid for 100 households.”* - Young man, Al Faraa

*“I have a degree in accounting. I would like to work in that field. But I am the only person in my family who can work right*

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the interview there was no open road for local produce to reach any market, so in Al Faraa, which is surrounded by agricultural land, farmers were selling vegetables and fruit cheaply if they were harvesting their crops at all.

<sup>4</sup> The exchange rate at the time of interview was 3.5 New Israeli Shekels to the Canadian dollar and 4.45 NIS to the US dollar.

*now; I am the oldest child, so I took a [menial] job in a gold [jewelry] factory. I work about twelve hours a day. Sometimes more, and then I get home in the evening, after dark. I earn 30 shekels a day for this work [less than 7 USD]. It is too much for me... six days a week! I get so tired. As much as my family needs the money, I think I am going to have to quit.” - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“My brother left school and now isn’t working; it causes problems in the house. When my father was alive he would always say, “Get a job!” It brought tension in the house. Now no one even looks for work because there is none. Before the Intifada, one could point to the men who went to work and see how they came home carrying groceries or shopping from the city and say, ‘See they are working’. Now everyone is doing nothing. They are depressed. They don’t even try to find work...People have cut off their telephones to save money, and even the electricity and water in their houses. They can’t afford it. With little money to pay for gas, they barely can cook let alone heat their rooms in the winter. And to speak frankly, four of the young men here today [in this group discussion] have to register for university tomorrow, but they don’t even have an agora coin [fraction of a shekel<sup>5</sup>] in their pockets.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“Most young men in Ein Beit Il Ma’ Camp used to work in Israel. They could make more than anyone around - between 150 to 500 shekels a day<sup>6</sup>. One problem was they didn’t save anything. They thought the work was always there and always*

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<sup>5</sup> See above.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately \$42.00 - \$142.00 Canadian dollars.

*would be there. They thought the situation would only get better. When the Intifada started, the money stopped. People live in extended families. No one here [Ein Beit Il Ma' Camp] can really say they live in a house with less than 9 people in it. The young men would leave school and work in Israel, happy to help support their large households. They would earn more money than most educated people. Now they do nothing, sit at home. They want to work but there are no opportunities. You have to remember also that most of those killed or imprisoned in this Intifada were the breadwinners from their families. This creates further problems. When there is no food on the table and they eat whenever the UNRWA delivers its decreasing rations, the young men talk about doing suicide missions inside Israel. I hear this in my [counseling] sessions not infrequently. Most people are living off rice and lentils in the camp [Ein Beit Il Ma']. I went to the clinic. If you go to the clinic and look around, you will see that most people are not healthy. Children are sick, they have colds, malnutrition, lack of vitamins, and you can even see children with rickets, their bones all bowed.”*

- Social worker, Nablus

## **Early Marriage**

Early marriage is defined internationally as marriage below the age of 18. The problem exists almost exclusively among young women. While early marriage is often tied to poverty and education in addition to local tradition, it merits its own section because of the frequency with which it was identified as a serious concern by young people in the targeted camps. New legislation is seeking to raise the legal marriage age to eighteen from former laws inherited from the Jordanian administration of the West Bank which set it lower. Existing legislation however is not enforced and marriages of women who are younger

than the required age are easily registered with false or missing documentation and the sanction of an Islamic cleric. A girl may marry in Islam when she is deemed physically mature by a religious official. While there are growing advocacy efforts by young people and women's groups around the dangers of early marriage, many clerics defend it as a means to protect the honour of girls and their families. Young women are most often married off to men significantly older than they are. While young women technically have the right to refuse marriage or a particular suitor, parents do influence them and most marriages are arranged ones.

In the testimonies below, we have opened with the contribution of a woman about forty years old in one of the camps to give an example of how a parent perceives early marriage in addition to young people. Marriage is a very important and nearly mandatory institution in Palestinian society - early marriage, divorce, engagements and broken engagements played a large role in nearly all of the youth discussions. Most young women and men who participated in this project were against early marriage as they thought it detrimentally impinged upon a young woman's education, career, empowerment, and health.

*"I was 15 when I was married. And by the time I had my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in my husband's house I had had my younger son [implying there was at least one older one]. I was very clever in housework in my parent's house and looking after the little ones. And when a well-born young man came to ask for my hand, we married. They [my parents] married me off while I was still very young. And so we [me and my husband] have lived this life with its bitterness and its difficulties and tough times together. I was in third year of middle school when I left to get married. I couldn't really understand what was happening. I was ignorant. Not like today's young girls who are alert and know more. Ignorance was a big factor. I wanted to get married, I wanted a*

wedding gown, and I wanted... I wanted... I wanted to sit on the bridal dais...I couldn't imagine what my life would be like one year later. I was so happy, so happy just to put on the wedding gown. And with my friends I felt so happy when I talked to them. And a lot of girls from my class got married at the same age and had children. One didn't used to read and know about things. They would give birth and not know what was happening to them. It was early marriage. Not like the girls today. I have five girls, one is married, one in Iraq and two are in Amman and the third is also engaged to someone in Amman, but of course we didn't encourage her to get engaged in Amman...so far away. I did not marry off my girls when they were too young. The first was 18 when she got married, the second 19, and the third 21. If I will marry off [name removed] it will be when she is 18 or 19. The youngest who is 17 I won't arrange a marriage for her yet, engagement yes, but not marriage. One finished her first year of secondary school before she got married, another one was heading for her tawjihi, and the third one was in her third year of secondary school. The headscarf was the reason this one left school. Her father said 'Wear the headscarf', and she said she would only wear it if she believed in it. So her father said 'No more school. You're not to go to school without a headscarf' so she got married. The one who finished her education after the first year of secondary school, she learnt how to cook and everything. They told her if she comes back to school they will help her. They want them to finish school now."

- Middle-aged woman, Askar

"Early marriage is a problem for both young men and women in the camp. A woman should be a child or be young a bit longer. By 25 the women get used to marriage, I suppose. We

*are Arabs. It's like that. We don't like divorce. But it can be hard. Some women really suffer psychological problems because of it. Like my sister."* - Young woman, Al Faraa'

*"Look at the girls. They marry them early. 15, 16, 17. They [the families] can't [afford to] educate the girls. So they marry them off. The girls suffer. A family can't educate everyone on the little money they have, so everyone doesn't have the same opportunity even in the same household".* - Young man, Al Faraa

*"I know a girl who had to leave school before 15 when she became engaged. Now she is about 15 and pregnant with twins. She is too young. Her mother is so pleased with her. Do you see how crazy these people are? So proud of her and her body is so small. And her husband at the most is 24. It's a shame; she is only a girl, 15. I am 18, I don't know anything, how to cook, how to raise children. How can she be married?"* - Young woman, Jenin

The following is a conversation of a group of young men in Ein Beit Il Ma' on this topic:

*"Our problem as young men is not early marriage, it is late marriage. We personally are not relaxed inside which is no fit state to get married. We have no money, no place to live. With the girls maybe it is different"* - M.

*"A girl should get married about twenty or twenty-two. By twenty-five she is too old. It is hard for a woman to find a husband here in the camp if she is over twenty-two."* - S.

*"When you marry young as a man you have no money so you have to live in your family's house."* - F.

*"Families prefer to educate men if they cannot afford to educate the whole family. For the poor it is better for them*

*to marry the girl off early so they are no longer responsible for her.” - A.*

*“For us as youth, we cannot dream about our future as we are supposed to be doing at this age, we have to work to build a future for our younger brothers and sisters.” - M.*

*“If a young man, one of us, wants to get married, it costs a lot of money. We would help each other out and each give a bit to help him marry well. All the costs of the wedding are on the groom. It is not like some other countries. It is not just the costs of the wedding that rest on the groom, but if the bride’s family needs money or there are extras, or they ask him for money he must give it to them. And the brides cost a lot of money. For the daughter of ——— they are asking 25,000 JD. And for what? Yes she is pretty. But that is a lot of money. Who has this kind of money? On average here it costs around 2,500 JD<sup>7</sup>. Some people pay for a bride by just having recited some verses of the Quran. I know one young woman who was married for the recital of the Sura Al Baqara [a verse of the Quran] - F*

*“Of course the bride has to be beautiful and young. That is what people say here. But there is no attempt to get to know each other. This is the biggest problem. A woman may be beautiful and young, but if she is not educated this is a problem. She will not be able to raise her children well.” - S.*

*“I have four sisters but I believe that a woman has to be educated. What if she marries and then her husband dies, God forbid? She has to be able to take care of herself. Women*

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<sup>7</sup> Approximately \$35,700 US and \$3,570 US respectively.

*have to be educated in my opinion. In my opinion it is impossible for me to think that my sisters or any girl should marry early.” - A.*

In response to the question of when they define late marriage, the young men decided that late marriage for a young man is late twenties, thirty definitely and agreed that the optimum age for a man to marry is around twenty-five they say. They concluded that educated people marry over twenty two.

*“Early marriage for girls is a big problem...when they are fifteen or sixteen. How can a young woman take responsibility for a house or children or a husband at that age? It is a big problem. Her parents might marry her off because they cannot afford to feed her or take care of her. But do they look at the husband’s financial situation? Can he feed her? They don’t really care sometimes because at least she is not their responsibility any more. Early marriage is very tied to poverty. But it doesn’t solve the problem. The girl is happy, she gets to wear a white dress, gold, make-up, have her hair done, and generally people make a fuss over her -which they usually don’t do otherwise. When they ask her at age fifteen if she wants to get married - still a child - she looks forward to getting all dressed up. She may see her prospective husband and he may be handsome, have a fancy mobile phone, a car, a house and that seems like a good future. But he may not have a job. There still may be no money, security, or support there. A young woman will not know how to take care of children, and many times she is married to the first offer perceived as reasonable. It may not matter where he lives. She may be moving far from her family and then she has no one to go to when she has questions or needs support.  
- Social worker, Nablus*

## Education

Poverty is a major factor in young people's inability to finish their education. While the education of young women suffers because of marriage or the distance of schools, many young men leave school to work. But more young men may be staying in school because of the Intifada as there is no work to lure them. And both men and women are returning to finish their educations if they are able, because there are few job opportunities and they want to present themselves more competitively. In the refugee camps, young people are disadvantaged because they attend UNRWA rather than Palestinian government schools. The UNRWA schools end at tenth grade<sup>8</sup>. Refugees must go elsewhere to complete high school and sit for their matriculation exams - *tawjihi*. The children from the refugee camps must change schools when they finish with the local UNRWA schools and often this means traveling farther, sometimes across checkpoints, on a daily basis. In some cases it is a matter of kilometers which may be perilous because of unpredictable Israeli military operations and families may worry about how to preserve the honour as well as safety of their girls on their way. Many youth complained that the education they get in English is of poor quality in the camps, and that they suffer a disadvantage in the last years of high school and in the *tawjihi* because of it. In addition to these hurdles, the refugee camps and the Intifada do not offer an atmosphere conducive for learning.

There are problems with continuing education for girls. In the Ministry of Education a young woman or man is allowed to resume his or her education in a government school as long as he or she is under the age of eighteen. If one is older than eighteen one can either go to private school or one has to pass an achievement test, which is the equivalent of that of the ninth grade curriculum. If one passes this test, one can sit for the *tawjihi* exam, having studied for it independently.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the age of compulsory education.

Technically, a young woman can attend a government high school after she is engaged or married, but culturally this is often discouraged. Parents and husbands are not often supportive of a wife continuing her education, as her main responsibilities are expected to now be confined in the home. In addition, in a society where virginity, sexual innocence, and separation of the sexes are widely advocated for young people, the mixing of young married women with those ignorant of the nature of sexual or marital relationships is deemed inappropriate. In some areas youth claim that the school itself will not allow a married woman to attend, even though this is a direct violation of the Ministry of Education's policy.

Palestinians are an educated population, and pride themselves on this. As refugees, many believe that education is the only thing that the Israelis ultimately cannot take away from them if they had it. But getting it is not easy. And even with degrees, work is not guaranteed.

*“We are not allowed to go to town [Tulkarem] even to learn, even if we go with someone else. Girls in the camp aren't allowed to continue their education here. If there were classes for tawjihi in the camp - nearby - I would have finished my education. I was good at school.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

*“After one year I will finish school I hope. All I can think about is passing my tawjihi exams. I haven't been able to. English is the hardest subject. I even went to a private instructor for help. If you asked questions, he screamed at you. The first two days were okay, and then it became terrible. I went to learn, he just wants to get through the lesson. English and Math are the hardest subjects. They are not well taught. But I am glad in the new curriculum they are starting English early. It's good to know. Maybe the next generation will be better off.” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“There are no results now for one's education. You can have a degree, but it does not mean there are any jobs. We could be*

*taking an exam and the soldiers could close down the university. We are at a point when we don't even know what we ate for breakfast or where we were this morning. There is so much instability in our lives. Last year I was taken to Huwara military detention center. We were kept for two days tied hands and feet, sleeping like sheep on the cold stones. No blankets, no pillows, and no food or water. On the third day I was released and had to go directly and take my tawjihi exams. How well do you think I could concentrate? We are worried all the time. Invasions, curfews. How can you study? Concentrate? This situation breaks us. It is psychological terrorism.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“I have finished tawjihi and I should have gone to college, but haven't gone yet. There was no money for university. I wanted to study elementary school education. I write. I have to write in my diary. It helps me to relax. I also walk sometimes to calm down.” - Young woman, Askar*

*“This year we have about 50 students from the camp who are sitting for their tawjihi exams. Most of them need some special tutoring help on how to take the exams. Only maybe 12 or 15 can afford such a thing. For a series of classes it costs between 100 and 200 JD<sup>9</sup> per student! I wish we could organize such classes in the camps that could serve everyone.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“There is no calm inside of me or outside for studying. I have to study for my exams, but I cry when I study wondering why I study if I have no future. My sister is the same. Even if I study very hard, I think ‘What next?’ I have four brothers in university: one at Al Najah [in Nablus] and three at Al Quds Open*

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<sup>9</sup> \$143.00 - \$286.00 US approximately.

*University [in Tulkarem]. My brothers don't work, nor does my father. I tried to work in a kindergarten but they only kept me for one month. I am in university. Should I register for next month? It is not like I am a girl who has a lot of money to go to school on."* - Young woman, Nur Shams

*"I didn't want to get married. I said I wanted to get married later. I wanted to finish my studies. At first my family listened to me, and then they put pressure on me. Especially my aunt. I don't know why I agreed. I was fifteen years old. My family influenced me. I was engaged; my friends encouraged me to go back to school. My mom said I didn't know anything about keeping a house or cooking, so she kept me at home to teach me. When it came down to it, I didn't want to marry. I refused. It was that simple. I have been sitting at home ever since. I take beautician training classes at the center. That is all. I rarely leave the house. This man they wanted me to marry, he was more than twice my age. He was in his early thirties. He had a house, a car, a job...etc. Now if I want to get married to anyone who has less than he did, my parents would say 'You passed up a good opportunity for this man? You could have had a good life, but you refused.' They are afraid of love relationships. If he is a good man, from a good family, if my family knows him, if he has a job, this is how they judge a husband. It has nothing to do with the girl, with understanding between the girl and the young man, or with love. ...Now how can I go back to school? The private school will take five hundred dollars a year to take me. I cannot go to the public schools because of my age. And anyway, how can I go to school when all my classmates will be five years younger than I am?"* - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma'

*“Leaving school is another major problem for the young women of the camp. They do it so easily. The UNRWA school ends at tenth grade. They really should change and offer the grades through tawjihi. After the UNRWA school ends, the girl must attend school in the city. Many parents do not allow this. Even if they do allow her in principle, it still takes money. There are books to buy and transportation to pay. This one girl came to me and said she was so sad because she really wanted to continue her studies but her parents didn’t have the money. I gave her fifty shekels<sup>10</sup>. She was so happy. This little bit of money made the difference in her life. She could continue her schooling. Soon after her mother found a job and there was enough money so she could stay in school more easily. I get happy whenever I think of this girl.” - Social worker, Nablus*

### **Values, Inequality, and the Relationships between the Sexes**

While many daily exchanges among youth are about the injustices of the occupation, many in-depth discussions -especially among women- addressed the issue of inequality between the sexes, the relative freedoms of young men and women and the unequal access to resources. Young men are generally given more freedom of movement and are often responsible for decision-making about their lives; they also play a large role in determining the lives of their sisters. Many of the youth identified differences in practices and values pertaining to these issues within the Palestinian society, often differentiating between camp, city, and rural populations. For the young people interviewed, the freedoms discussed were not only that of movement, education, and participation in activities, but relationships - platonic or romantic- with the opposite sex. As evident throughout this document, the honour of young

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<sup>10</sup> Approximately \$11.00 US.

women - resting not just their chastity but their good values and “appropriate” behaviour - is fundamental to the honour of the family. As Palestinians encounter increasing exposure to Western influences and continue to resist the Israeli occupation, society as a whole is becoming more conservative. Women are more restricted in dress and movement than they have been previously; these restrictions are more social than religious. But young people struggle to find their identity as youth in their society and part of that struggle is to define their beliefs whether in accord or discord to those around them. In numerous cases youth pointed out a double standard which exists for women: one’s relatives and neighbours, and others. While these are very sensitive subjects in Palestinian society, many of the youth were eager for an opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences - especially in the safety of conversations with people who were not from their camp.

*“Of course there is a difference between boys and girls. Families worry more about the girls. A young man can go anywhere and his family will not worry about him. The girl... of course her family will be worried about her. It has been like that since our grandfathers’ time until now. If we go someplace they ask ‘Where did you go? With whom? How did you get there? How did you get home?’... The young man, I will tell you, he will manage; ‘a man will always land on his feet’, these expressions are always used by our mothers. I mean, put him anywhere and he will manage. With young women, she’s like a pane of glass. If it breaks, it’s broken. It’s impossible to fix it. That’s how it is, that is the point that our parents always emphasize. The young men have more rights, rights in everything, better rights than we have even in their education. They will educate your brother. Why? Because he will be able to leave, to travel. They will not allow you to travel. They worry about you; they fear someone will take advantage of you. Often this is how our parents speak.*”

*Sometimes they speak like this sometimes not. For strangers ... [people who do not have family in the area] ...it is not the same. Think of the number of [female] university students who come to Nablus from elsewhere [in Palestine]. They do what they want - let down their hair. They can talk to people, men. But us, with our tradition and our morals? No, we cannot.”*  
- Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’

*“To go outside the house I have to get permission from my mother, because I only leave my house with my mother. I stay at home usually. I sometimes beg my mother asking when she goes out if she will take me just because I want to go out of the house for a bit. Once she saw my brother and me in the city and asked ‘What are you doing there yourself?’ Now I go everywhere with my mother. Anywhere I go, I have to go with my mother. It’s okay. I guess it’s okay.”* - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’

*“I once told my mother I would like to finish my tawjihi. And I asked her, “And if I wanted to go abroad, would you let me?” She said “No”, I said “Why?” She said that “One who is from here should stay here, among her family.” I said to her, “I would not go to any place but an Arab country”, but she said “No, impossible”. We dream however.”* - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’

*“My parents did not want me to go out of the country to study. I could have gone to Russia. They didn’t want me to be among people whose traditions and morals were different than ours.”*  
- Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’

Marriage does not have a consistent effect on young women’s perceptions of their freedom.

*“I am from a very conservative family. I was not even allowed to go to visit my aunts when I was growing up. Now that I am married here I am free to go anywhere - and not just because I am going with all my cousins like before” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“I grew up in Toubas. My village is much more open than this camp. I feel so constrained. So constricted here. It was so open and free where I come from. People are so conservative here” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“We haven’t seen anything in our lives, we haven’t been anywhere. I was a child during the first Intifada, and I am a young married woman during the second. Between these when I was unmarried and everything was forbidden for me as a young woman it was just ‘go down to the store and get me a packet of this or that’ at the most. Now I have children and am married and it is Intifada again. When you begin to be shy of the young men...this is the most important thing for a young woman. It is very important for the society to see a young woman is restrained. Girls and older women have more freedom than young women.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

In a discussion about computer use the following account was given:

*“We go to centers. We don’t have computers in our houses. In the centers sometimes, but not in our houses. Oh, I don’t know what he [my brother] would do to us if we used the internet. Once I said I had a yen to see what the internet is like and how it works. He said, “It is just like a computer, you sit and you turn it on.” “If it is just like a computer, why can’t I go to the center and use the internet?” I asked. He said, “There is not one girl who uses the internet who is not fallen.” I said “Why do you say fallen?” He said, “Why do*

*they go to the internet except to get to know young men.” Some of them of course do go for research. But he has more than one female friend [over the internet] and he has gotten to know them and it turns out they are from our camp. He signed off very affectionately to one girl and then I don’t know how he figured out where she is sitting in the computer room and he writes her “Oh daughter of good people you are from our camp and I am coming to see you.” He walked over to her and said, “I am a son of your camp and do not come to the computer center again, that’s my advice to you.” And she said, “What business is it of yours?” And so on. And she said, “I didn’t want to get to know you I thought you were a girl.” He said, “Who do you think you are kidding? Go home, go home or I will tell your parents.” That’s his mentality. I don’t know why, I like to try everything. Even if it was me and it was somebody from my camp or not and whether I knew him or not, if I want to know something I will do it, I will try it. Even if he [my brother] doesn’t think it is a good idea, if I feel comfortable in myself doing it, I will do it. Firstly it is up to me if I am comfortable with my conscience, and if I have the blessing of my God I will do it. If I feel at peace with my own conscience, I do what I want. I do not want to not look for instructions from people who wear headscarves [meaning those more socially conservative]. At our university - unlike Najah where it makes no difference if a girl wears or doesn’t wear [hijab] or talks to young men or doesn’t - in our university because we are all peasants or refugee camp people, and only a very small proportion from Nablus, when the young men see a Nablus girl nicely dressed, in the latest fashions with make-up and hairdo, I mean, they make a million assumptions about her. They chase after her until she puts on*

*a head scarf [to ward off their attentions]. I said to them if I don't wear a shawl, am I blaspheming against my God? But I am at rest with my conscience, I speak to boys I speak to girls. I know more boys than I know girls. For one thing the girls around here are jealous. If one is better than the other in her grades or her studies, or in looks or style, they get very jealous. As a result they begin to feel that they don't want to have anything to do with her. So you find that you make friends with boys more than with girls. And young men are much more helpful, they help me much more than girls help each other.” - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

Brothers play an important role in their sisters' lives.

*“If the father is out sometimes the eldest brother takes his place in making decisions about immediate things. But also I understand young men better than my father does. Sometimes I put limits on my sisters because I know young men, how they think [about girls], what they do.” - Young man, Askar*

*“My brother does not let me go to the roof to hang laundry without putting on my mendeel [headscarf]”. - Young woman, Nur Shams*

*“My brother tells me about his girlfriends and asks me about my opinion. But I would not tell him things. I listen but do not tell him things about myself. Once he told me about a woman with whom he became friends through the internet. They became friends and he said they were like brother and sister. She was from the Emirates, and was in love with a Palestinian. He got the man's telephone number and called him and said that he knew this woman, and she was very nice, and very good. He helped them to get engaged. And I asked him, “And if I did*

*something like this?” He shouted, “I would kill you”. I said to him “Am I not your sister and you said that she was like your sister?” He said, “No, no, darling, it’s different, much different.” - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

We posed the following question to young women in Ein Beit Il Ma’: “If you think about your future, if you have female children, now or in the future, what do you hope for them? They offered the following statements:

- ◆ *“I hope that they are educated.”*
- ◆ *“Yes, they should be educated and they should become something.”*
- ◆ *“Yes, she should feel that her whole life is in front of her, that she can do what she wants.”*
- ◆ *“She should know that she can make her own choices. That the future is hers.”*

These comments obviously reflected what these women for the most part do not have for themselves. We then asked them whether they would differentiate between their girl and boy children.

- ◆ *“Of course not. I will not differentiate. The girl should have freedom, but within limits. Not complete freedom.”*
- ◆ *“Their freedom has to be somewhat limited. We have to protect their education, protect them, but the best thing is that they can love each other. To teach them to love their country, their people, and to love the world. But the greatest thing is that they love each other.”*
- ◆ *“I would want that my children do everything in front of me, nothing behind my back.”*

When asked whether they do things behind their families' backs, they [laugh and giggle.] Not always answers one, another assures me nothing really bad behind their parents back - *“not like real relationships for example, but maybe that one likes someone or something. We don't always see honesty or frankness between young people and their parents.”*

*“Young women are allowed to serve and not to ask. There are many things they don't know. They need self awareness first and also knowledge about society and religion, their history...it is really a loss, they don't know very much. They don't have much to go on. They don't understand what equality could mean.”* - Psychologist, Nur Shams and Tulkarem.

*“The girls say to me, how lucky you are, you don't have to wear a mendeel [head scarf] or a jilbab [long over-garment]. You can wear pants and go where you want. This depends which camp. The girls from Balata [another Nablus refugee camp] are very different. They can go out where they want by themselves. If a girl here is caught out by herself, her parents will most probably end her education. I always try to help the girls to think about their possibilities. If there is a rock in from of them, they always try to climb it. They never think of going around it. I do not encourage them to do anything that will get them into trouble with their societies, but I do try to get them to think differently and to try different things and different tactics.”*  
- Social worker, Nablus

## **Discrimination against Refugees**

While the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is familiar to anyone who picks up a newspaper almost anywhere in the world, the internal conflicts among Palestinians remain largely obscure. In light of the Intifada, few Palestinians

want to talk about social divisions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but the second Intifada is not like the first. It is not popular, and the camps have felt the brunt of the occupation. And camp residents are acutely aware that they are discriminated against by other Palestinians. Most acknowledge that discrimination originates in ignorance.

*“There was a problem in the university. There was a fight between two girls. One was from a village and one was from the camp. They were fighting and the village girl was calling the other one a refugee (in a derogatory way) a “muhayyamji”<sup>11</sup>...*

*if they want to say anything bad about a village person they will say they are uneducated or unaware. Sometimes people make fun of the village people’s clothes. Clothes can tell you a lot about where people are from.” - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“There is discrimination. Before, if I remember, if someone from Nablus wanted to marry a girl from the refugee camp, his family would cut him off. This is still the case in some instances. But what has changed, maybe the young people have been to the university and maybe our ideas are different from those of our parents”. - Young woman, Askar*

*“Ninety percent of the time no Nablus family will give their daughter to a young man from the camp. Even if you have a lot of money, there is still discrimination.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“In the university most of my friends are fellahin. Originally we are fellahin from near Jaffa so they are like us. Some of us have friends who are from Nablus, but people’s attitudes do change when you are from the camp. People do differentiate.*

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<sup>11</sup> This is a derogatory term meaning camp resident or “camper”.

*But about people who discriminate against us? It just means that they have little understanding of the camps and our history.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“There are differences between the girls in the camp and the girls in the city. It depends upon your personality and your individual actions, but we do have different values, traditions, and upbringing from them. The girls in the city, their fathers are all important people, - at least their parents are more educated - and they have land and houses. We dress differently. We are refugees and they don’t really know what that means.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

*“There is discrimination against people from the camp. Girls in school used to call me ‘muhayyamji’. I do have friends from all over though. But we live in the camp, and for instance, we are not really allowed to marry someone from Nablus city. If I married someone from Nablus his family would say “Come here muhayyamji” and not treat me very well.” - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“Because we are a small area from within the city, whatever we do reflects on the camp. If there is a young man from the camp who steals something and then is caught, it reflects on the camp. He will be known as ‘the thief from Ein Beit Il Ma’’. They will never say that about someone from Nablus city. Everyone talks about it and then the whole camp gets a bad reputation.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“If we get married, there is no place for us to live. It is too expensive to live outside the camp. Apartments in Nablus are expensive, and when the owners hear we are from the camp, they double the rent. It is one of the reasons why we are not married.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

Not wanting to give the impression that Palestinians in general are ignorant or prejudiced, one young man said the following:

*“Palestinians are more equal to each other than other people in other places. There is awareness. Despite the occupation, despite the camps, despite all of our problems, we are educated and aware. Look the guy who comes and sells salt out of a bucket; he has a doctorate in chemistry.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

### **The Occupation and the Refugee Camps**

The Israeli occupation entered every discussion and every topic. It was easy to talk about and often conversations would open with exchanging the latest news. The refugee camps have been very hard hit by Israeli incursions during the current Intifada, and they also are some of the places in which there is the most resistance. This section is mostly about the effects on youth of clashes, checkpoints, closures, curfew, arrests, assassinations, and other acts of Israeli violence. We hope these statements can give an indication of what the occupation feels like on a daily basis for these young people.

*There are seven people in my house. I am the oldest one. I care for everyone and I don't have a minute to rest. I work from 8 until 2 in the women's center. Then in the afternoon I don't rest I have housework and visitors. Late at night I watch television to rest. I worry about the youngest one. The youngest one in the house is in his tawjihi year. He sits and tries to study but thinks of other things. Maybe the struggle is more important than his studies. He has no opportunity to rest or relax or do something to empty his mind before returning to his studies. He stays up late drinking coffee and smoking and thinking. He is distracted. He feels no real hope or motivation to study. How can I encourage him?” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“There is no calm. They [the Israelis] can’t even let a wedding happen without disrupting it. I am so frightened something will happen. I don’t like to go to the bathroom by myself; I ask my sister to stand outside the door in case the [Israeli] army comes. I try not to go to the bathroom when I am home alone.” - Young woman, Nur Shams.*

*“We need to look at the children to see the real [psychological] effects of the Intifada. We need to look at what they play, at what they draw. Have you seen their drawings? Always the same things, flags, blood, tanks.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“Life continues under the occupation, but not well. People study in this situation. Girls are stuck at home and it is all the occupation. Tanks, bullets...I can’t concentrate, I can’t even sleep. How are we supposed to study? Teachers are stuck [because of checkpoints] and can’t get to class, and they killed someone on the morning of the tawjihi examination. Concentration? Forget it! Everyone is affected.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

*“In the current situation, men are loosing care for anything. They say to me that they don’t care about things anymore. At least this is what they say to me. The pressure on the women makes them [the women] anxious. They say they are sick, they feel faint, their legs don’t hold them, and they don’t want to go out, they are afraid to go to the W.C. by themselves. One married woman tells me she just wants to see her mother, to go home and be with her mother and feel safe. People are turning back to things that make them feel comfortable - the things from their childhood for example. Even I find myself writing in pencil as I used to do in school. I find it comforting.” - Social worker, Nablus*

*“There are no health facilities in the camps. No ambulance. Sometimes if there is an emergency when the Israelis close the roads it will take over a day to bring an ambulance into the camp to evacuate someone. No doctors can come to the camp when the roads are closed. Sometimes if the soldiers are afraid of an attack they don’t let anybody through the checkpoints no matter what. People die you know.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“Each of us [in the discussion group] has at least one family member in prison. My brother is in prison. Once a month we talk to him. My mother cries. How can I help her? I feel handicapped... There are checkpoints. My sister lives in the next village, Toubas. It’s been a year we haven’t seen her or our cousins there. We are too afraid of the roads.” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“Toubas is the nearest town. It is 3 kilometers away. This is where we go to finish high school. Very often there are soldiers on the roads. It costs one and a half shekels<sup>12</sup> each way to take transportation. If there are soldiers and it takes longer it can cost up to five shekels<sup>13</sup>. If you study at Najah in Nablus you have to walk over three kilometers through the mountains. They closed the camp for the tawjihi exams this year; the students had many problems reaching the town to take them.” - Young woman, Al Faraa*

*“I don’t have a proper identity card so it is difficult for me to risk going to high school in Toubas if there are soldiers on the roads. And if I go, I am often late for classes. My parents don’t*

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<sup>12</sup> Approximately \$0.33 US.

<sup>13</sup> Approximately \$1.10 US.

*like me to come home late, but I do if I have to avoid the soldiers. Sometimes I come home and it is already dark. The soldiers are less harsh with the schoolchildren. They don't need IDs. I am not very big, so sometimes I try to hide among the young schoolchildren who are coming home from the town.*" - Young woman, Al Faraa

*"I used to cover my face with a veil. The soldiers made me lift it three times on the way to study at university. I decided it wasn't worth it. I now just wear a headscarf, I don't cover my face."* - Young woman, Al Faraa

*"I have three brothers in prison. We don't know what will happen. We are always afraid. A missile could kill us at any time. People have to come here and see what is really going on. To see the situation. One time we were going somewhere and there was a tank on the main street. We took a side street but a stone pierced the bottom of the car and we lost all of the petrol. And we were standing on the street and the tank came. I have never been so scared."* - Young woman, Jenin

*"It is difficult when a man goes to prison. It is difficult for their family as well. A friend of mine is 32 and he is in prison. I talk to him on the phone. He is in administrative detention. He has no idea when he could get out. He had just gotten engaged when he was arrested. Now he is worried whether he should make his fiancée wait until he is out of prison or let her marry someone else if she asks. If he is in prison for seven years, if he comes out, that is a long time to ask a girl to wait."* - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma'

*"The young people don't have a life; they either want to end theirs or dream of leaving. They see so many images of life*

*outside. They want to learn how to drive, meet girls, relax, hang out. Nothing different from any other young man. As one young man told me “I want to live in my land freely, not just watch the Israelis take our land, destroy our property, arrest us and ask us to show them our hands so they can see if they are dirty from throwing stones”.*” - Social worker, Nablus

*“Can I speak frankly? The biggest problem for young men is the fear of failing. Not finding the appropriate house, woman, work...etc. This is all tied to the occupation. The first and biggest problem is the occupation. It is not our society.”* - Young man, Askar

*“You can see the daily psychological stress these young people are subjected to. They have so many of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: little value for life or death, senses of isolation, loss of weight, lack of concentration...and so on. I have not found one young person in these camps who is not suffering from a form of PTSD. It has a snowballing effect. And there is little support or encouragement for them at this age. We have to look at why these youth are so unmotivated.”* - Psychologist, Nur Shams and Tulkarem

*“We are not afraid of the Israelis. The soldiers come and beat us and we are not afraid, they shoot us and we are not afraid. We are not afraid of being beaten, being shot or being arrested. We are not even afraid of being killed. What we are afraid of is failure.”* - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma'

*“A young man has to be confident and capable, but in this situation he is not able to do anything. No chance to do anything. No chance at success. We cannot even go anywhere. Look at the roads. We just play cards.”* - Young man, Al Faraa

*“This Intifada is different because it focuses on the camps. Most of the martyrs are from the camps, most of the prisoners are from the camps, most of the suicide bombers are from the camps. There is a reason for this. While the rest of society continues with its life, we always feel the occupation in the camps. The occupation stays in the camps whether it is 1948, 1967, 1995 or today. We are still living in camps. We are the most affected by occupation from generation to generation. The sense of occupation stays in the camps and with us always.”*  
- Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’

## **Project Ideas**

A large reason for compiling the statements and stories of young people in the refugee camps of the northern West Bank was to provide material to help in project planning. In this section we present their perspectives on the availability of resources, and programs, current activities, decision-making, local attitudes, and ideas that youth have for future projects as well as their experiences.

*“There is a problem with authority over one’s own decisions when we live in such close quarters. There is no personal space. When everyone from the family is in your face all the time it is very difficult to make your own decisions sometimes. It is difficult to use or even find your own judgment. And in our society the elders are always right. On the other hand, we did something here. We decided to make a student’s council in the camp. We sat around and planned it and we did it, see here we are. And we do things. We run the after school tutoring program for children. But generally speaking, we, as youth, are not encouraged to partake in things. We are just supposed to do what we are supposed to do.”* - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’

*“We have so much free time. Any program that we could benefit from would be great. Creative writing. Anything to get away from the [political] situation.” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“With the new curriculum children are taking English and computer classes from their first year in school. We want to take the things we missed. My brother’s children ask me questions I don’t know the answers to. They work very hard. We could use a real women’s club with a good library, a swimming pool, computers, sports equipment... I don’t know. So we wouldn’t have missed things. We have to know computers. Our children need to know computers and we cannot help them.” - Young woman, Jenin*

*“We have our values and our traditions here. Many young women cannot participate in local programs or training even if it is only for women. We can’t go anywhere in the evening. And some families barely let girls out of the house. People aren’t very open, even in my family. Some people keep their girls in the house from the age of twelve.” - Young woman, Nur Shams*

*“If I go too often to the Women’s Center, the neighbours will come to my parents and ask me why I have to leave the house all the time. Everybody has to know everything. I think cities are more open. But it is not as conservative as the villages here in the camp” - Young woman, Al Faraa.*

*“We go to the university, to the youth club or hang out on the streets. Most of the places in the city that one can go to are only for families. When we were small we played in the streets, now we hang out on the streets. We are still on the streets. When we have no work we hang out on the streets, and when we are old men we will sit with our argiles [water pipes or*

*“hubble-bubbles”] on the streets. We will spend our whole life on the streets.” - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’*

*“I had a problem when I started participating in training programs at the center. My family - especially my brothers - gave me a hard time. I explained to them that I just went to the Women’s Center and came straight back. I didn’t go anywhere else. I told them that I just wanted to improve myself and maybe benefit others. Now it’s okay” - Young woman, Al Faraa*

*“I took a course in First Aid in Zababdeh from one in the afternoon until five. People helped me to do this. Helped my parents to trust me [to go that far]. Whether we talk to our parents or not there has to be trust between us.” - Young woman, Al Faraa*

*“It’s better to eat bread than have programs. We have scouts. Save the Children has a few programs. Summer camps, gender issues, early marriage, First Aid, communications, democracy. Those types of programs have been here. But we have no organizations that are consistently active. There are organizations in Toubas and other places, but not here. There are 6,500 people in the camp, fifty people came to a conference on early marriage.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“What we would like as a project is for the local council to do a statistical survey of the whole camp. But there is no money and no local organization will support it. Imagine, we get a specialist, he trains a group of us, and we work together and publish a report that includes every house in the whole camp. So we know how many people are really here. How many people are needy, sick, in school, everything. So we know who we are. Not someone else telling us.” - Young man, Al Faraa*

*“If we had a vocational training center in the camp, iron work, electrical work with some kind of international certification, everyone would benefit. It could provide work we could do here in the camp even. There is no such place in the whole area. And there is no road to go even to Jenin. This [closure] is going beyond temporary. And we are sitting idle. What do we do to occupy ourselves? We walk in the streets... if we can.”*  
- Young man, Al Faraa

*“I have two things to say. Firstly, many projects target educated people in the camp and alienate the uneducated. There should be more vocational or work training projects. More small enterprise projects. But note that there is a danger in these projects as well. Both types segregate the educated and uneducated youth. Secondly, most projects are intended to build our capacities, and few take into account that we have very few opportunities for recreation and relaxation. Activities could be cultural ones. And they could serve to integrate all members of our community. For instance, starting a young men’s debke group would be great, a football club, or offering artistic activities. Table tennis, billiards, building a café on the roof of the club where we could gather. All of these, we dream about.”* - Young man, Ein Beit Il Ma’

*“Projects and programs always target the same group. This is partially the fault of the programs themselves, but also the traditions of the community. It is easier for centers and clubs and organizations to bring together groups they have already convened rather than recruit new members and participants. Also for young women there are very few families that allow their women to go outside the house. When a husband or father allows his daughter or wife to attend programs or training, people will think she is trying to prove something. They think that she thinks*

*she is better than other people. And they think that she is strong. Stronger than her husband, or father or brother. A woman should always be under the control of her brother, her husband, or her father in the society. Of course there is a problem of (political) parties in the camp. Certain neighbourhoods or families are considered to be only belonging to one party. Certain services are provided only to party members. Families also fear a young woman or a young man might get caught up in politics if he or she goes to a certain center or house. Or they fear that they might be in the wrong place in the wrong time and get wounded or arrested or something.” - Social worker, Nablus*

## **Last Words**

The camps are home for this generation. Some of the youth like the life in the camp. Others can't wait to leave.

*“The camp is good. People stand by each other. When someone dies they stand by his family. In good and in bad we stand by each other.” - Young woman, Askar*

*“I don't like the camp. Everyone is in everyone else's business. I could relax if I left the camp. I want to leave and never come back. I would like to go somewhere and open a little salon”  
- young woman, Nur Shams*

*“The whole camp is like a family. I like it. I feel it is my land, my country, my camp. Maybe the young men want to get out, but I want to stay.” - Young woman Nur Shams*

*There is a very close feeling in the camp. It is like a family. Everyone knows everyone. Everybody helps everybody else. Everyone shares in all events. If there is a funeral, everyone from the whole camp attends. - Young woman, Ein Beit Il Ma'*



## Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations below arose out of the conversations with youth over the course of this research and are drawn from and supported by the experiences of the young men and women who contributed their thoughts to this report. Above the young people discussed a great number of their concerns and here, more concretely, they point us in the direction of their solutions. The recommendations given here are organized to reflect the structure of the previous section.

### Housing in the Camps

- ◆ Work to provide appropriate housing for refugees
- ◆ Create appropriate and appropriately equipped local study areas for youth in refugee camps.
- ◆ Establish play areas for children in the camps either through renovating existing vacant areas, developing agreements with local schools or other existing resources, or even by equipping the roofs of certain buildings as playgrounds if they are suitable.
- ◆ Advocate for the development of appropriate emergency and medical response equipment designed to penetrate the camps' sometimes less-than-meter-wide streets.
- ◆ Encourage innovative (and hygienic!) animal husbandry projects possibly exploring models for urban agriculture and sustainable livelihoods.

### **The Economic Situation**

- ◆ Create job opportunities for young men and women through developing the Palestinian economy.
- ◆ Develop innovative income generation projects for the centers that serve youth such as cafes.
- ◆ Establish appropriate local vocational apprenticeships, training, and workshops that meet local market needs.
- ◆ Work to increase and support the number of small businesses and household economy projects especially among young women.
- ◆ Establish university student -run tutoring programs for children that would not only benefit needy children but possibly provide an opportunity for job-creation programs for youth.
- ◆ Encourage the independence of the Palestinian economy while reducing dependence upon Israeli goods.
- ◆ Encourage employers to offer internship, mentoring, and volunteer programs’.
- ◆ Develop and enforce transparent job hiring procedures.

### **Early Marriage**

- ◆ Enforce laws concerning legal marriage age.
- ◆ Hold campaigns to discourage early marriage.
- ◆ Offer training to young women who married early so they can develop their skills.
- ◆ Permit married women to attend government schools and free programs through which they and other young women can study and register for the tawjihi.

- ◆ Encourage young women (and men!) to complete their tawjihi.
- ◆ Offer programs to encourage the economic independence of young women.

### **Education**

- ◆ Encourage UNRWA to extend its educational services through the end of high school.
- ◆ Develop free educational programs for people who would like to return to school after the age of eighteen.
- ◆ Offer counseling to young people as well as programming to help them in career choices and decision-making.
- ◆ Offer subsidies for student supplies at all levels of elementary, middle, and high school.
- ◆ Offer English courses.
- ◆ Offer tawjihi support classes.
- ◆ Raise awareness among parents about the importance and benefits of young people finishing high school.
- ◆ Provide easy access to libraries and quiet study areas for both men and women.
- ◆ Increase scholarships for students in need or develop a free governmental higher education system.

### **Values, Inequality, and the Relationships between the Sexes**

- ◆ Involve siblings (brothers and sisters) in programming together as an effective strategy to improve the attendance of women whose families are more socially conservative.
- ◆ Insure that there are adequate appropriate and accessible resources for both young men and women.

- ◆ Increase the availability of, or provide sustained counseling for youth in schools and local community centers.
- ◆ Encourage in-depth discussion groups among the youth to discuss relevant social issues and encourage mediated discussion or workshops with parents and community leaders about these issues.
- ◆ Hold a campaign to break down the stigma of consulting a psychologist or social worker.
- \* Equalize the opportunities of access to activities for young men and young women in programs of all sorts.
- ◆ Provide sufficient, accessible, appropriate, and equal recreational, training, and gathering places for young men and women (even if separately).
- ◆ Develop effective strategies for increasing the number of participant women in community activities.
- ◆ Conduct workshops on gender issues in Palestinian society.

#### **Discrimination against Refugees**

- ◆ Create opportunities for youth from different communities to communicate in structured and productive ways.
- ◆ Network youth organizations from different communities.
- ◆ Raise awareness within Palestinian society about the history and situation of the refugee camps in the West Bank.

#### **The Occupation and the Refugee Camps**

- ◆ Develop channels through which young people can effectively participate in raising awareness about the effect of the Israeli occupation on them and their lives.

- ◆ Educate young people about their history and political situation and comparable experiences around the world.
- ◆ Equip young people with knowledge and advocacy skills so that they can promote the interests and needs of their communities.

**General**

- ◆ Increase awareness in Palestine and abroad about the specific problems facing refugee camps and their residents, especially those that are more isolated from major cities or towns.
- ◆ Increase the cooperation between local centers, organizations, and institutions to maximize existing resources.
- ◆ Encourage open discussions between generations through the development of inclusive and participatory programming.
- ◆ Establish gathering places where young people can meet and exchange ideas that are approved by the local communities.
- ◆ Encourage the development of healthy recreational areas in or near the camps for use by people of all ages.
- ◆ Provide recreational activities (such as sports, arts, dance...etc.) for young men and women so they can try to recapture some of the youth they feel they have lost.
- ◆ Encourage and support youth-run projects.
- ◆ Integrate youth concerns into national policy-making efforts.
- ◆ Insure that young people are actively involved in local decision-making processes.



## S stories

Below we present the stories of youth to give a sense of their situations as individuals. They introduce themselves and we allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions from their thoughts and experiences.

### **A young man from Ein Beit Il Ma'**

*"We are nine. I am the oldest. There are four girls and five boys. I used work for UNRWA but my work with them finished in December. I worked doing field work for them and saved money. And now for four months I have not had any work. At the same time I am not in the university. I should have finished in September. I study administration and finance. I don't know what to do. I am not in school and not working. One of my problems is that I am the oldest [male] in the family after my father died. Most of the children are younger and in school. There is one brother who is 22. I can't leave them to find work. Maybe I could find a job elsewhere which would earn some money, but then I couldn't take care of them. I could send them money, but money isn't everything. I am afraid for them.*

*The youngest child in our house is 8 years old and then I have a sister who is 25. I am the oldest, 27. All of them are in school except two who don't work. I earned a diploma [2 year] in sociology at Al - Najah University in 1996. I tried to continue, I wanted to finish my studies and get a BA, but this was a problem [economic] of course, so I worked. I saved money for the household. This helped. The Intifada broke out. I got a job for a year with the UN. This was good work. I went back and registered in the university. When I registered in the university I felt really overwhelmed; I didn't*

*remember everything I had studied before, I didn't want to lose the year and a half I had already finished at the Open University [towards a BA], and because of the [political] situation I didn't really know how I could finish. It's very difficult.*

*My 25- year-old sister, she works in a nursery school. She graduated from high school with a tawjihi certificate. If she were a college graduate maybe she would get 1,200 NIS a month, but with just the tawjihi one gets only between 500 and 600 NIS a month. She used to get 700 NIS, but now because of the political situation she gets maybe 400 NIS<sup>14</sup> a month, maybe a bit less. This is what she does. The tawjihi was hard for her. And now her money is the only earnings that support the whole family.*

*I have another sister studying for her tawjihi. And then there is the 22 year old brother who left school without passing his tawjihi four years ago. There is no work for him now. There used to be work with the Palestinian Authority in control, there was work. Now with this Intifada there is nothing. When the situation was better it wasn't a problem. There was work for him. It was good work, it was fine. Now there is nothing. My certificate, it is not enough. There is no work now. Only for the highly educated. So you see just one of us is working. 400 shekels a month. That is not enough for ten to live on.*

*There is not even any daily labour for me or my brother to do. In the West Bank, nothing. And we can't get to Israel any more. Israel closed itself to anyone from here...Look at our society. It is small but it is educated. And there are many young people in our society. If in every house there are a couple of students, university or primary or elementary school students, and if every household is depending on one or two people to bring in income and there may or may not be work, it's a problem.*

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<sup>14</sup> 1,200 NIS is approximately equivalent to \$265.00 US, 500 NIS is about \$110.00 US and 600 NIS is about \$132 US, 700 NIS is about \$154.00 US and 400 NIS exchanges at about \$88.00 US.

*I have been responsible for the family for two years now on my own [since our father died]. I am now in my second year of university. I should finish this year, but because of the political situation and my family's position, I could not take all the hours in the semester. In the Open University, it's not like Najjah. Most students don't carry a full load of classes. I take classes as I can afford them. And if I want to work, I have to leave my schedule open during work hours.*

*I agree with what my friend said the other day, even though we are not old yet, we are not like other youth, youth in the rest of the world working for our own futures, we are working for the futures of our younger siblings or our children if we will have them. We don't really have opportunities. My two youngest siblings, they are very clever in school. All my growing up, I wanted a computer, and even now I don't have one. I hope that they get one soon. I want to buy them a computer so that they can go learn everything, and do well in their studies, and so that they can go to school and feel as though they are students. Students like all other students.*

*My parents were not educated at all. They didn't learn English. I studied English at school and I am okay in reading and writing. I hope I can help my younger siblings in English, at least encourage them and help them until they are a bit older. I hope that by the time they are twenty they have a sound knowledge of English, better than I have. Maybe with a diploma and English, they can find work easily.*

*Things were hard when I was young as well. When I was finishing high school, I was given a shekel every day for lunch. During the break I would be hungry. I would have to choose, do I spend the shekel and buy two half-sandwiches that cost a shekel, or do I buy a half-sandwich and some biscuits. If I bought the two half-sandwiches I would be satisfied, if I bought only one half, I wouldn't be full but I would have something to sweeten my mouth.*

*My sister who is in her final year of high school, studying for her tawjihi, I can't just give her one shekel a day. Transportation alone costs two and a half*

*shekels. Every day I give her five shekels<sup>15</sup>. It's a lot. If she is to love school she must go everyday feeling like a human being, feeling as though she is one of the girls, like all the rest of the students. So every day I give her five shekels, but I remind her that I used to get only one.*

*When I was in school though there weren't as many differences between the students. The main difference that the boys drew was between who was from the city and who was from the camp. Of all the kids from the camp, maybe the only difference was some of us would get one and a half shekels for lunch and other would get only one. Life for those from the city was easier than it was for us. We kept our distance. Each to themselves, those from the camp and those from the city.*

*I hope the situation doesn't get worse than this. I hope it gets better. I hope my younger siblings finish their BA's easily.*

*I wanted to study for four years, but I couldn't because I had to help my family. So I studied and quickly earned a two-year diploma and went to work. But even when I studied it was easier than it is now. Our weekends started on Wednesday night, Thursday and Fridays we had off. I would leave university on Wednesday and work in Israel on Thursday and Friday. When I would return to school on Saturday I would have a check in my pocket for 300 NIS or 600 NIS<sup>16</sup>. I would work in construction in Netanya or Ramat Gan sometimes Tel Aviv. I could live through the following week taking care of all my expenses and never having to ask my mother or father for anything. I was pleased that I could actually give them money. I could spend money on a friend if they needed it. Buy a shirt, trousers. It was good to earn money while I was in university. We could get good work. But sometimes if there was an opportunity to work in a bank or for a lawyer locally we would take it. Less money, but it was related to our studies. It gave us experience.*

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<sup>15</sup> 2.5 NIS is about \$0.55 US and 5 NIS is approximately \$1.10 US.

<sup>16</sup> Approximately \$66.00 or \$132.00 US.

**The student's council:**

*The council is still young. We started two years and four months ago. I am a member of the administrative board. We wanted to do something in the camp mainly because of the occupation. There is a big problem in the camp. The problem is with the school students themselves. It is difficult to be a student during this period of occupation. We go often to the [local] school and bring them [the students] to the council and work with them. Whether the students are at grade level or not, they are all having problems in school because of the situation. They are all burdened by it.*

*Yesterday we went and spoke to the local [boys'] school principal. It is not easy to get these students to learn. Not all of them, some of them do well in their studies, but maybe we have 150 - 200 students and there are 60 or 70 who haven't learned anything. Some of them don't know how to write their name even. We just try to teach these students the basics. How to read and write. It's not easy, and there are probably many more, but we just concentrate on these 60 or 70 boys. Then let them go off knowing a bit more. Having a bit more direction. Maybe it will help them eventually to learn a trade. At least it keeps them off the streets. It may keep them from dropping out of school. Let them benefit from something, learn. Let them come and try to learn for half a day.*

*If I were a 14-year-old boy and hanging out on the streets, having dropped out of school. I might not feel as though I have any responsibilities, but I also may stay hanging out on the streets for another twenty years. Sometimes it is difficult; we have to go to the families to encourage them to send their children to school and to our program. The families can be more of the problem than their children. Many aren't giving their children any encouragement. The kids have to take care of themselves. Neither the mother nor the father tells them to go to school, they don't push them. They say they want them to go to school, but many parents would take their kids out of school at sixteen anyway to go to work with them and help support the family.*

*My mother she helps my siblings with all their homework. She can manage until about 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She tries to understand everything, even the English. I*

*help them as well. I have reached a point where I don't have the wherewithal to live; I mean there is some money, but no extra. We can't send the kids to special tutors for help. The new curriculum is harder as well. But the kids like it. The books are highly coloured, there are pictures. Everything helps.*

*I live in the upper part of the camp. It differs from the middle of the camp and the lower camp. The people in the upper camp are more educated than the rest. Once with the council we went to the lower camp to search for students to participate in the program. We only found one. In the university there are very very few students from the lower camp. I don't know the reason for this exactly. I think it has something to do with where we all came from when we became refugees. In the upper camp we are mostly from Jaffa [a formerly prosperous Palestinian port city]. In the lower camp I don't know where they are from, but from a town Yazour maybe. They are all relatives and live next to each other and know each other.*

*When I come home in the afternoons, after the after-school program, I come home to the house. There is no place to go. Seven, eight, nine o'clock, I am sitting in the house. Where is there for me to go? If I sit on the doorstep of the house I feel as though I have gone out somewhere. In summer we used to sit outside on the roof and drink tea. But not now, there is a bit of fear from the area above the camp<sup>17</sup>.*

*I have a room on the roof that we are building. I live in that. My family lives below in two bedrooms, all nine of them. There is a room for my brothers, and a room for my sisters and mother. And there is one sister who lives with my grandmother on another floor because my grandmother is ailing. She is old. My uncle's house is on the first floor, and they, like us, are nine. On the second floor, my grandmother and uncle's family are five. On the third floor my other uncle made two apartments and then there is us. I hope to complete the fourth floor when I have a family. Make room for me and my brothers. But then there is family that works abroad and when they come with their families and use their apartments we have over 60 people in the building. We are generally at least 25.*

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<sup>17</sup> On the top of the mountain behind the camp there is an Israeli military installation.

*We have relatives in Lebanon, Denmark, America, and Norway. Emirates all over. When I was younger I worked for a while in the Emirates but returned after six months.*

*A family member became ill. She got an infection. They say it came from the neighbours goats. They keep them on the roof because there is no room here. Two weeks she was sent to Jordan for a cure. She went to the bridge 15 minutes before closing. They returned her to Jericho hospital. She was worn down. She became a martyr at 6 o'clock the next morning. There was a young woman with her who also died in Jericho because she didn't reach Jordan and could return to Nablus.*

*Many have the same problem. There are many in the camp who suffer without jobs, no health support. There is no real support from the university. I need more hours to be able to get a scholarship. There is a scholarship to go to France, but even if I got it I would not want to go. If I went to France I would have to learn French that would be another two years just learning the language well. I would get a better education there, but it would take longer and I would be afraid to be leaving my family. I don't think I can do that although I would benefit more than studying here even in the same subject".*

### **A young woman from Ein Beit II Ma'**

*"My mother loves education. All 8 of us are educated. 4 boys. And 4 girls. She doesn't want any of us to marry early. We all have to have a BA, whether we are boys or girls. After a BA she thinks we have to look at our lives and decide for ourselves. To work, to marry, to do anything, she has a democratic outlook; we should do what we want after that.*

*We have an [student activities] office in the university. She knows that we are young men and women who have activities together. For her it's okay, it's normal. She knows that each one goes out and does her work, what she is doing. She knows I have friends male and female, and I tell her about them. There are other families that don't like their daughters to have any male friends.*

*It's not for any other reason than they are afraid for them. Afraid that the young men might take advantage of them. But with me it is fine. But in the university for example, the young men from the camp don't like to see me talking to a young man, it bothers them. It doesn't bother me because I tell them my family knows I have male friends and I have the freedom to do as I see fit. And sometimes I bring them to meet my family and sometimes my brothers talk to them on the phone. My brothers are educated and aware. They don't have a problem with it. There is trust and openness between us, we are all older, we are not young. We are mature.*

*I haven't sensed any discrimination in the university against girls from the camp, by either the professors or the other students. Maybe other girls have different experiences, but I have not seen anything like this...But there is a difference in the way people treat young women. In the university the professor will push the male students and say study, work but not the girls. It's the same thing in school. They push the boys and are nice to the girls.*

*In the classes, the young women talk more. The young men are all grouped in the back of the room silently by themselves. The women sit in front or in the middle and answer the questions. The young men listen to the young women and watch them and decide which ones they like. They [the young men] are shy, but if a girl answers a question incorrectly or asks a bad question they correct her.*

*I am in my second year in university. I am studying accounting. I chose this field because I will have a future with a degree in this field. This field has lots of possibilities. Maybe I don't want to marry, or my husband dies, or if the situation is like the present situation and my husband cannot work, I can still get a job. I can get a job and find my own freedom and myself. I can be independent. I can work in any place, a business, an organization, a ministry, or if I have to in the house.*

*My eldest sister studied in Jordan, My brother is getting an MA in aviation, and has a diploma in computer networking. I have another brother who studies hotel administration and tourism in Egypt. Another brother studied computer programming, and I have a brother who works.*

*I went to more than one school. Until 6th grade I went to the UNRWA school in the camp. Then for middle school I left to attend a school in Nablus. Then I went to high school at Jamal Abdul Nasser School, and tawjihi in another school. When I was small I didn't like school. The style of teaching among the teachers in the school I didn't like because there was blatant inequality in the treatment of the girls from the camp and the girls from Nablus. When I first went to school there I was in seventh grade, I made a fuss because of it, and there was a fight between the girls from the camp and the girls from Nablus. They would say that the girls from the camp were not clean and well behaved. That they don't study. They have these stereotypes. When we got to know each other, we became friends. And some of my dearest friends are girls from Nablus from that year in school. Some have gotten married and still come and visit me in the camp. We used to go shopping together and even chose the same hats and scarves. In high school it was the same thing all over again because it was a new school. But the teachers were good and we liked them and we liked the subjects and we did well in them. They didn't discriminate and girls came from all over to go to that school. The teachers treated us normally and that was good for our spirits. It was different from here. Here it isn't so. The tawjihi in this school, I hated it. That's why I never studied for it. I didn't think I would pass and graduate. The school principal was terrible; she said bad things about us. When we first came to the school, we didn't want to be transferred to it but we had to because of the situation. It was the first year of this new Intifada and that's why we moved to this school [it was closer]. She wasn't very welcoming, she said if you don't like this school why did you come here and anyway you are "muhayyamjiyeh" and things like that. She would badmouth us and ask us why we came and we would say we came not for the school but because we want to study. The teachers used to differentiate between their girls and us newcomers. But despite this we all passed.*

*When they [the Israelis] started to shell the schools... [The teachers]...instructed us how to protect ourselves. The upper floor would go down into the stairwell. We were told not to stand in front of the windows and to crouch down in the corners. It's close to here to the camp. The school is close to the school. Jamal*

*is in the city, far from here, and the streets are wide and there are tanks and such like. Here it is easier. [When there were invasions]... we could walk home in small groups together. And the fire department and the Emergency Medical Teams came to train us for example what to do when a girl is choking on tear gas.*

*On the way to university there are streets between us [the camp] and the university and the [Israeli] tanks pass through there. There are a number of schools on these streets. And the schoolchildren go into the streets. They [the Israelis] tend to pass by the schools, then they shoot at the youngsters. And the schoolchildren, they see something big, in their hands they have stones. They want to do something about it, and they don't find anything except for these stones.*

*Once in the university, and we were in our classes and people began to say there was a curfew and no one was allowed to move on the streets. You should have seen the atmosphere in the university. Everyone came out [of their classes to go home] and it almost looked like a demonstration. As for the tanks, as soon as they saw us they began to shoot at us. Where did we hide? We went into the neighbouring shops and locked ourselves inside them for safety. We started to call our parents, but the lines cut. We didn't know from where to telephone, which scared my friends. They were scared of being shot. One of my friends, they shot at her, they didn't hit her but they shot at her between her feet. She fainted. She didn't know what to do. She started to cry. And her house is on Amman Street - on the other side of the city near Askar Camp - that street is very frightening. They [the Israeli army] close it often. She probably arrived home at sunset - around five or six in the evening - and we left university at noon. But it was a good day even though it was frightening.*

*Another day we were leaving university, and they [Israeli soldiers] occupied a nearby building, so we hid in the insurance building next door. There was a lot of shooting. I just put my head out of the window [to see what was happening] and a bullet came whizzing by my head and lodged in the sign of the insurance building. And this tank was below and we wanted to go home... [We went out the back] to take a taxi from a different road, a detour where there were no tanks. But then when we left the building we found many other tanks and a lot of shooting. And there was blood.*

*One man was hit in the head and his head split open. I felt very dizzy immediately. There was a doctor who gave us something to smell to keep us from fainting. We left the insurance building and went into another building. And there were other tanks there and they were shooting. The shops were all shuttered and there was no place to go. The tanks eventually left and we went home. There were many injured in front of us. One in his back...lots of injuries... another in his chest - it was all blown apart. Many were injured in front of us. The ambulances were there. Of course I was looking from the window. I wasn't going out. I was backing away.*

*In the night I don't study. Only in the daytime. For a start, at night if the Israelis see a lit room they could shoot at it. Anything that requires light we don't do. In the daytime, before I go to university, I have some time, I study. I pray [the pre-dawn prayers] and then sleep a little, and then I have two hours to study. They say that morning study is productive and I study during this time. When I return from university in the afternoon, I sit, rest a little, and then there is time, I light the lamps until about ten and study. If there are planes or anything we turn out the lights.*

*Of course our grades are lower than they were before. There not much studying going on. We follow the news all day long, we listen to it. Before it was better. We would get up at three and what you studied early in the morning would stay in your head. It's different than study during the day time. Of course you concentrate but it is not the same.*

*The planes still come and of course we are frightened. A missile hit our neighbours' house. It's very close to us. I will show it to you. And many houses have been demolished. Two people were killed and their houses were demolished. Their families had to move elsewhere.*

*There is one who was going to get engaged the same day they blew up his house. He said [to his fiancée] "you don't bring me good luck", and he broke the engagement because he did not have a house in which to live any more.*

*The camps take more damage than the city. The army focuses more on the refugees. They shoot at them. I think they want them to leave, to expel them.*

*More people die from the camps - even from starvation and sickness. Many die in the camps. The targets are the camps, Balata, Askar, Ein...they have many martyrs, many have died.*

*We are living on land which is not ours. We are refugees. We don't have property, land, houses. We are eight in the house. Three rooms only. This is not big compared to other houses. We are forced to build up - on top of each other. People live in the same house, the whole family. They can't move to a new house. They stay in the same house, with the same things, the same place. It is very crowded. There is no space between one house and the next. The sun can't shine in. There is not enough proper ventilation. You have seen the alleyways. No light reaches into the rooms.*

*Of course, money brings some things. It can get you out of the camp. And then you could give your house to people who need it. But there is never enough money to start a project, a business. You remain a worker, a labourer. You can't start anything big. There are not many who are educated because there is not much money. They say to you get up and work; it's not a matter of diploma. If it brings in money, well and good. As long as you bring money you're okay. But to be educated and not bring in money you'll stay as you are, nothing will change.*

*When they refer to us as refugee camp people, of course it hurts me inside very much. I think,*

*I am just like you, a student, I am like you I might even dress like you, and I may even dress better than you. We have to make a good impression. So that when they [the Nablus people] speak about us they have to say that we study, we are educated, we work, we brought back life to this city, we have built many things here, and we have worked in this city. We are living in the same place. We come from a city, and if it had not been a good place the live, the Jews would not have come and taken it from us long ago. We could not live in the same level as we had lived before. We had many orange groves, big houses, and we earned good money. And we were in a position to employ the people from our city to come and work in our groves as labourers. So why do you then speak about us as if we are very different from you and as if we had never lived the way you live now. Why do you speak this way?*

*Why do you have this attitude? We were friends. I've seen your house, visited it. The camp is even better than the old city [of Nablus] which is dark. Here is a bit better. Just as you say painful things to me I can say painful things to you. In the old days, people from Nablus, from the well-known old families, used to come on their donkeys to work for us, and to earn a pittance... So why do you speak of us in this way? If you knew who we were you wouldn't speak this way. If you saw the way we used to live you wouldn't say such things.*

*We made a film of our village, Yazour near Yaffa. We have a film which says this is my uncle's house, this is the house of relatives, here's the coffee house that we made, here's the mosque, the orange grove, and here is the road. They filmed everything. The cemetery and the keys of the house we lived in. In the house where my family lived there is now a Jewish family. A complete film, they filmed the village and its houses. And of course there are the memories of my mother and my grandmother. And all the time they sit and talk about the village. That there was a big fig tree and we used to feed all the neighbours from it. And in the groves, the Jews used to come and work the land. They had given them asylum and allowed them to live among us. They would tell us about the old days and what they used to do and eat. How the food was different than it is today. There were no chemicals, things were different then.*

*Things are very different now. You can't go into the street. You can't go out into the gardens and see some green. You can't move from place to place. In the other Intifada you could go out and you could get a permit to get into Israel. You could take a trip, go to the sea, and get a change of air. Now we can't wait for them to lift the curfew just to be able to go out onto the street. We can't even dream of reaching the hills around us, but at least we can get as far as the street now. Let them give us a bit of freedom".*

### **A young man from Ein Beit II Ma'**

*"The biggest problem I wanted to talk about is the problem of housing. It is a big problem. As a university student, the atmosphere for studying in the house is not natural. It has effects. There are young children with no recreational places to go. They stay in the house or around the house along with the neighbours' children.*

*They make a clamour, noise, banging, shouting, everything. There is no place for them to play. You can't blame them. In normal days the students would do their homework in the evenings, at night. Now the problem is that at night there are soldiers, the sound of tanks coming and going and coming and going. The problem is that I can't concentrate any more at night. I can neither study in the evenings nor during the day. This is a problem for all the students in the camp. Also our financial situations are difficult. To finish our studies, puts financial pressure on our families. This affects the students a lot. When I think about the future, we are always scared that we will not finish our studies. That we could be killed by a bullet or a missile at any moment. This also affects us. Also we have lots of free time, we suffer from boredom. Inside the camp there is no place to go. It is boring. A couple of years ago we could go in the street, go for a walk, break the boredom. Now we see our friends in their houses. But all the houses are the same, filled with people. There is no place to go away to hang out and relax. We see our friends in the street. There is no place one can go to lose themselves. The club and the student's council help, but the club is not open in the evening. We are all university students; we share all the same problems. We thought that there should be in the club a room for us to meet in. If we want to study we could use the room as a study hall. To sit together, to talk about our problems, to help each other with our studies, and use some of our time productively. Play a little bit. Read books in a library. Most of the youth would like to play sports but there is no playground. Nothing nearby. Even if there was a sports field the youth would worry about going there. If the Israeli army came, how we would get home safely? And so on. All of it affects us. We all think about these fears and they affect us and our psychology and it affects our studies. In the Open University there are no sports facilities. In this situation we go to university every day. We used to go when we could, around our work schedules to take classes but now there is nothing else to do. If we can afford it, we take classes full time. Especially in the camp there is no playground.*

*The students themselves, or anyone, we are getting older, but we feel we don't know anything. We don't know anything about our future. Will there be a future for us. Work? If we are working and not studying or even if we finish our studies we feel like we haven't done anything. We feel as if we have exerted ourselves*

*for nothing. Among us there are those younger who are not educated really. They don't have a future. They live their lives from day to day.*

*We are 11 in my house. My father works day and night as a guard for a building. I am the eldest. My brother is 22 and when I was studying he was working. He didn't finish school. He dropped out of school early. I have three sisters. The eldest is married and lives in the same house. Our house was big enough. She married our cousin from Jordan and there they didn't have enough room to live in. So now they have two rooms from our house and we made a separate entrance for them. Now to solve the problem nothing is the same in our house. I have one brother in 8th grade, a little sister also in school, second grade. And sister who finished her tawjihi but is not continuing her education because of the political situation. She is engaged to another cousin from Jordan. He was here, but when the Israeli soldiers came to the camp they took him and sent him back to Jordan. We don't know whether she will stay here or go to Jordan ultimately. We have three bedrooms. One for my mother and father, one for the girls, and then upstairs a room for the boys. Despite the problems and the situation, we are a very close family. We sit together, talk, laugh. We share everything. We like to sit all together and watch television. Especially in winter. If someone goes away from the house it changes in the family. I went once to Jordan, my mother called from the minute I arrived telling me to come home. If one of us is late my mother will send someone to call him from work. My mother is very attached to us all. Our family is very strong. There are no problems. In the camp I see many brothers get angry at each other. That doesn't really happen to us. We stick together and love each other. We have a lot of dreams. We wish we had our own house away from the camp. A house with a garden in which we could plant things. Someplace that would be ours forever. That we felt was good forever.*

*Of course I worry about my younger siblings. When my brothers or sisters want to do anything they ask me. They come to me because we are close. Of course I worry about them a lot whether their studies or whether they go to 'good' places. I try to go with them; I tell them what is good and bad. Before I used to work and study. I used to work in different places in construction, sometimes for friends inside the camp; I would go with them to work. I used to help the family. Now I*

*can't do anything. And I see many things that the family needs and I can't help. My father works only so we can eat and drink. We need more than that. This affects me a lot. I can't help. I wish I could. It hurts that I can't.*

*We have the tutoring program we started with the Students' Council. The kids need help. Things have reached a point such that boys can't even read or write. My brother is among the youth we serve. So is our neighbour's son. And the number of such kids is great and growing every day. It's not like the previous generations of children; it was the opposite most of the children used to reach a good level of education. We wanted to make this program. We are putting a lot of effort in this project. We want to alleviate or solve this problem of illiterate kids in the camps. Their illiteracy will only make more problems for them later. We will try. It takes a lot: books, black boards, notebooks, pens, stationary. Most of this comes out of our pockets. We need a lot to do this. They have a problem, they don't like school. This is the problem in the classes. We try to provide incentives, games, even presents sometimes to encourage them to keep on studying. We don't want it to be so that in the future they don't know how to read and embrace things that aren't good like smoking at a young age or fighting or making problems. We hope to continue with this educational program. Also their families benefit. And we hope that in the future they benefit and maybe it will help them get any job.*

*We ourselves are students. We can teach them to read and write but there are things we can't teach or we need to be taught how to teach them. We need to bring some specialists to help us, also maybe some counselors. Many have psychological troubles or learning difficulties that we are not able to address. There are also students who have other problems, they are disabled, blind. We want to help them to succeed as well. The program works now but it has problems. We want to be better able to serve everyone. We need some more help. Also our council, we are all volunteers, we are students. When we have exams for example, maybe one of the university students can't come to the afternoon session. The children come and ask where their teacher is and we tell him he is not here today, come back later, and they leave. We don't want to have to do that to them. If we had a little money that made this a regular job it would be better".*

### **A young woman from Askar Camp**

*“When I went to the university, my brother forbade me to attend certain activities. I trusted him in his judgment. Maybe he forbade me because he is educated. There is trust in the house. Every house is different. I finished university in administration and work as a volunteer in a local center as head of administration. I am looking for a paying job. I have a BA in administration from Al Najah. My mother is not educated but she really encouraged me. I was very smart in school and knew I would go to college. If a girl is smart she will go to school. I really wanted to get a doctorate, but with the political and financial situation you know I cannot. I do really like my subject though.*

*I dream of visiting America or another big country. I like foreign films. They have completely different values and traditions. I want to see it in real life. See whether it is real and not just in the films.*

*Families protect their girls here - yes the religion says you should keep the girls safe, but not in prisons like they do here. There is so much lack of trust here in families. If a girl likes a man, her parents will refuse the match automatically because with feeling it has become something almost forbidden.*

*Personally, I am very tired. I feel as though everyone is far away from me. Even my family and my friends. Everyone asks me why I am so quiet. In this [political] situation people should be closer and stick together. I know, but I cannot. Some people search for a romantic relationship to feel that there is someone closer to them, they are running away from one thing to another. But the emotional problems one has are not just romantic in this situation. I have problems caring about my own family members. Loving them. I don't go out of my room. I can't handle this [political] situation any more. I am an emotional person so things affect me a lot. I like to give. I like to help people. I can not help people who are really needy easily. I cry. Wherever I go I see the oppression and injustice.*

*There is still hope for me. I look at my future. I want to be skilled, continue learning. I talk with my sisters. I watch TV. I write poetry. I read.*

*I am probably the only person who does not watch the news. I will wake up and people will tell me about the war maybe. I won't know already. Death is at every corner here. Maybe if I walk down the street to the shop the Israelis will kill me. Why should I worry about the news? Or the war on Iraq? Why should I put these things in my head? It makes me sick to watch the news. I cannot. I get tired. It's exhausting".*

### **A young woman from Nur Shams camp who is in her mid-twenties**

*"I am feeling a bit better since my brother was let out of prison. He was in prison for twenty-five days. We didn't know where or how he was. In the beginning of this Intifada he was hit by an Israeli bullet. It entered his forehead thirteen centimeters. He used to run a salon. A little coiffure shop. But he leaves it closed now. He cannot bring himself to open it. He just sits in the house. He was wounded again in the neck. There was a five-hour operation and then some plastic surgery. But it's his personality that has changed. His work used to be very good. Now he cannot sit in a chair for even a minute. He did not sleep well. And he was so badly beaten he cannot sleep at all now. A lot of people come out of prison crazy. We are happy he is okay but of course his character is different than when he went in.*

*My father is 67 years old. He worked for an Israeli municipality cleaning streets. He stopped working in Israel when they closed it to us. He is also too old. Another one of my brothers was a mechanic in Israel. It has been three years now and he has no work. He was engaged but had to break the engagement because he had to money to marry. Every three months we receive a case of rice, flour, sugar, milk, and oil. It is not enough. The owner of the corner shop, he gives us everything: cooking gas, food. We could not live without him. He doesn't ask for money. We started by keeping a tab, but then he realized our situation and he tore that up. He just says, "I help you now, maybe one day..." [you will help me or someone else].*

*My mother is sick with high blood pressure and diabetes. I am the only girl in the house. Our family was 7 daughters. All 6 are married. I also have five brothers.*

*I failed the tawjihi and soon after was engaged. But after one and a half years, the marriage didn't take place. If I had not been engaged, maybe I would have tried again to pass the tawjihi.*

*No organization has given us anything since my brother was wounded. I don't know why others got compensation [from the Palestinian Authority] when someone is wounded and we didn't. We registered with organizations, but they say because we have the salon, a business, they say we are not eligible. But the salon is closed. If my brother opens it he only does so to give a quick five-shekel haircut. And then he closes it again. He doesn't buy anything for us. He doesn't buy himself clothes, or clothing for the rest of the family.*

*No one knows about these problems. We are embarrassed. We don't want any of our neighbours to know. Even my old school friends that you met. They don't have any clue. On the outside everything is alright. See I keep my clothes perfect. But come to our house if you want to see poverty. Just come through the doorway.*

*One of my brothers-in-law gives me a bit of money. He is not responsible for us but he gives me twenty or fifty shekels every now and then because he feels for me. He understands. The beautician's training in the Women's Center is ten shekels a month. It seems like nothing. But it is a lot to me. It is usually impossible. In the house there is my mother and my father and me. And one brother and his children. He smokes. The cheap Arabic cigarettes, but even those are difficult to provide.*

*Before the Intifada no women worked in Israel. Now lots of women go. My neighbour's wife goes. She sleeps in Israel three nights, but it is difficult. She has children and her husband cannot take care of them himself. The women sometimes suffer bad words from the [Israeli] loudspeakers [at the checkpoints] but they suffer the humiliation because they have families to feed. And some have other needs. My eldest brother has two disabled children. My brothers used to work for the Palestinian Authority, now there is no work for them. They have to start new lives. They have families to take care of and cannot look after us. One of my brothers was active during the first Intifada and then he went to Israel and worked as an accountant with a municipality, can you believe it he has no work now.*

*Nothing. Two brothers, 31 and 27, they have nothing and no future. The one who was engaged, he started building a house, but has no money to finish it. Our house is small. We don't all fit. How can he bring a wife into our house?*

*Once my brother was sitting drinking tea with our cousins in the yard next to the house. One of our cousins was killed by a missile. Every day I hear the sound of that missile. At night I hear sounds that are not there. I have talked to a psychologist. That was on March 7, 2002. Five others were killed that day in the same neighbourhood. No ambulance could get here. They said, "We're coming, we're coming!", but the soldiers took their time and searched the ambulances. We were all screaming. It was three in the morning. He was holding himself bleeding crying "Uncle! Uncle!" The missile opened my cousin's body. It was burned. He was 27 years old.*

*When the missile struck the whole house was filled with dust. 6 or 7 homes were damaged. It is forbidden to build on a demolished house, but the neighbours can rebuild. Our other neighbour's son was martyred. The family is so worried their house will be destroyed.*

*I am the youngest of all the children. My mother and father are weak and often bedridden. When my brother was in prison my mother even found watching television exhausting. I can't look for work. If there was work, who would feed my parents, clean up after them, and take care of them? They are old. I even worry about them when I go down to the shop. Our family is small. My father is an only child and my mother only has sisters. My brothers, there is no future for those young men. I can't leave the house for three hours to meet with Aymad [one of the psychologists who was providing leadership training and counselling through Bisan's project].*

*Sometimes I get so frightened. Even though I have to look after my mother and she is very unwell, I need her to comfort me because I am so scared. After he [my cousin] was killed by the Apache, I have started to ignore things. I don't know how to cry. If someone died in front of me I wouldn't cry. But I jump at everything. If I am washing the dishes and someone enters the room I break the dishes. I jump. Sometimes there is shooting in the mountains. I can't sleep the whole night - not until after the sun rises".*

### **A young woman from Ein Beit Il Ma'**

*"We are dying of boredom. There is no place to go. If you want to sleep during the day there is no where to sleep in the house. If my brother wants to sleep, he can. But I can't. I don't work. My brother goes to university, if the children need clothes or something for school they get it...but I want to get my tawjihi but there just isn't enough money. I take two shekels every day from my brother who works. I would like to take tawjihi but I would need private classes. I am too old to go back to school. But that costs money. If I save maybe after two years I could try to finish my studies.*

*Wherever you look in our house a little boy peeps out. We are 19 people living in this house. My siblings and my brothers' wives. We have 4 rooms. And my brothers' children sleep with us so it's very crowded. I have a brother who was imprisoned in the church [in Bethlehem during invasions there]. I have a brother who was wounded in his leg, and if they take the bullet out he could be paralyzed. My father is a pharmacist's assistant. He is one of three partners - what can I tell you more. I studied only the first year of high school and now I regret it. There is a new project which will allow me to review for the tawjihi exam. Sometimes I behave impulsively, and do things and say things that I do not intend but the others think it is intentional. I am misunderstood. I am thinking to finish my tawjihi I hope I will do better in my subjects because my hope is to do better because I would like to work as a counselor. I don't know, I like to read about people's problems. I like to find solutions for them. That's the reason I want to be a counselor.*

*The people have changed in the camp. There used to be goodness and now it has gone. People would live, and be happy to let others live, now it is a dog eat dog world.*

*You can hear everything. Your neighbours yelling at each other, or someone calling from upstairs. Sometimes, of course there are problems, every house has problems. If there is a problem in the household and people raise their*

*voices everyone can hear them. Even ordinary conversations can get overheard and we have to say “lower your voice”. And there is no privacy. I would be lying if I said it didn’t affect everyone. For example, once I had a quarrel with my brother and he hit me and I loss consciousness and it was the neighbours who came to help me. All the same it’s not nice that everything, everything one does gets known.*

*In my free time I would like to work. I would like to work with my hands. And frankly I would like to do some kind of work that would bring me income. If some one has any needs, it’s only my father to spend on such needs. And every one of us has things that we need. I would also like to help. My father is responsible for 19 people. So of course there are things that I am lacking.*

*I have a hobby, everything to do with ceramics I like to do...baskets of flowers, decorative objects, frames, embroidery, I like to make them. I do this at home. If my friends ask for something I will make it for them. I would like to have a project, a little business. I like to make things. I make decorations with flowers for people. My sister she asked me to make some decorations for her house. I saw some things I liked and without training or anything I just made them for her. I found the materials cheaply and I made them for her. Copying the ones in the shops. I do this for my relatives. I don’t take money. But I enjoy it. If I found someone who would buy my things, maybe I could make really beautiful things”.*

## C Conclusion

The youth who were participant contributors to this study are very aware of the problems they face and that there are youth elsewhere who do not have to encounter the same hardships and injustices as Palestinian refugees living under Israeli occupation. At the same time, Palestinian young people are profoundly uninformed about social movements, struggles, feminist efforts and experiences of refugees or statelessness from around the world. Their own experiences and preoccupation with local politics may eclipse their capacity to examine other models of existence and resistance. As is evident in the testimonies given above, many youth are dissatisfied with their roles in the society, and aspects of the society itself. Change must come from within Palestinian society, but some of the tools, venues, resources, skills, knowledge, and motivation to embark upon such change must also be made available. The Palestinian educational system and its emphasis on rote learning, coupled with the daily humiliations and pressures of life under occupation are keeping youth from being in strong personal as well as social positions to shoulder leadership in their communities. Structures need to be created to institutionalize ways in which young people can be involved in decision making processes in order to contribute in meaningful ways to the development of a vibrant civil society in Palestine.

Leaders are not born in isolation. There has to be a community setting in which they can exercise their skills. Local community centers and organizations, whether voluntary, charitable, religious, cultural, social, athletic or political, are training grounds for young people to build the skills they will need to make decisions about their own lives as well as work to improve the

lives of their communities. All those interviewed displayed a sound commitment to working for the betterment of their communities and the growth of their country. Through supporting local organizations and the active involvement of youth within these organizations we can begin to combat some of the social, economic, and political issues that hinder the healthy development and participation of young people in their society.

## Annexes

### Annex I

#### Cost of Living in Palestine

To give the reader an idea about the cost of living in Palestine, we can compare the average Palestinian consumer prices as determined by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for March 2003 with comparable Canadian ones of 2001 provided by Statistics Canada. We have tried to use the most recent figures available in both countries and are employing a current exchange rate of 3.5 New Israeli Shekels to 1 Canadian dollar. This exchange rate was supplied by the Canadian Representative to the Palestinian Authority for April 2003. All dollar amounts given here represent Canadian (not United States) dollars.

The average cost of **fresh milk** in Palestine is 5.35 NIS (\$1.53) per liter. In Canada, the price is approximately \$ 1.43. Olive oil in Palestine costs about 17.85 NIS (\$5.10) a kilo, while cooking oils cost about 6.26 NIS (\$1.70) per liter. In Canada, a liter of cooking oil costs approximately \$3.04. 500 grams of **processed cheese** in Palestine costs 8.89 NIS (\$2.54) while in Canada it would cost about \$5.34. The cheapest **fresh chicken** (un-plucked and with bones) costs about 9.72 NIS (\$2.77) per kilo, while in Canada, chicken meat costs \$5.45 per kilo. A kilo of **oranges** cost about 1.97 NIS (\$ .56) but in Canada oranges are \$2.13 a kilo. **Bananas** on the other hand are 3.7 NIS (\$1.06) and \$1.27 a kilo respectively. **Potatoes** in Canada are 67 cents a kilo, while a Palestinian pays on average about 2 NIS (57 cents) per kilo. One hundred **tea bags** will cost a Palestinian 14.28 NIS (\$4.08) and a Canadian \$4.69. **Macaroni**

or pasta sells in Palestine for about 4.83 NIS (\$1.38) per 500 grams while a comparable amount in Canada costs \$ .96.

A 25 kilogram **bag of rice** can cost about 70 NIS (\$20.00) and lentils run 4.14 NIS (\$1.18) a kilo, while a 60 kilogram bag of flour goes for about 102 NIS (\$29.00).<sup>18</sup>

Some other important figures are as follows:

**Textbooks** for one year from the new Palestinian Curriculum for a primary school student cost about 36 shekels if the child is not attending a private school where supplementary texts in French or English can cost over 50 NIS each with two to three books for each class. School uniforms for government schools and UNRWA schools cost between 60 and 100 NIS each.

**Petrol** for automobiles, per liter, is about 4.9 NIS (\$1.40).

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<sup>18</sup> The figures in this paragraph are drawn from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Web Page at <http://www.pcbs.org/english/cpi/statist/price1.htm> and Statistics Canada as they appear on <http://relocatecanada.com/foodprice.html> as retrieved on April 15, 2003. The exchange rate as noted is considered 3.5 NIS per Canadian dollar.



