

# Gaza: Female Journalists Face Worse Than Discrimination

Tuesday 2 March 2010, by [FRYKBERG Mel](#) (Date first published: 15 February 2010).

RAMALLAH, Feb 15, 2010

Female journalists worldwide complain about discrimination on the grounds of gender. However, their colleagues in Gaza also face death threats, the dangers of working in a war zone and the struggle for daily necessities as the Israeli siege on Gaza drags on. Last year a shadowy group in Gaza calling itself 'Swords of Islam' threatened to slit the throats of female journalists who appeared on TV with their heads uncovered, calling them "shameless and immoral." The Hamas authorities took the threat seriously enough to offer the women protection. However, the Hamas security forces have themselves on occasion been part of the many problems that Gaza's small number of female journalists face.

Last year Asma Al Ghul had her passport confiscated by the Hamas government's Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice security force as she swam in the sea fully clothed, but without a hijab, with some male colleagues. She subsequently received death threats on the phone.

Gaza is a deeply conservative patriarchal society where many people believe a woman's place is in the home with her husband and children. The free mingling of the sexes is frowned upon.

This attitude has impacted negatively on Gaza's female reporters, especially those married with children, as they try to report.

The issue came to a head recently when dozens of female journalists held a rally outside the office of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS) in Gaza City and demanded that membership of the syndicate be opened to women.

Maan News Agency reported that journalist Dunya Isma'il called on the PJS to introduce a set quota for women members, as in the Palestinian Legislative Council and to delay elections.

"We request legal standards in registration and representation of female journalists in all the union's committees, including membership and contest committees," she said.

Earlier this month the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also called on the syndicate to postpone general elections in an effort to "establish an acceptable mechanism which guarantees transparent and comprehensive preparation uniting all journalists."

But it would appear the women are facing an uphill battle in their fight for equality.

"Female journalists have to work twice as hard and overcome double the hurdles that their male colleagues face," Hibba Zayyal from the United Nations Development Fund for Women's (UNIFEM) Gaza office told IPS.

UNIFEM Gaza carried out a gender needs assessment on the difficulties women face in Gaza. Its case study, in conjunction with the Al-Kawthar Centre between 1995 and 2005, showed that 79

percent of all female media work in Gaza reinforced stereotypes of women.

"Women mostly cover entertainment and cosmetics. The more in-depth subjects such as the conflict and analytical pieces are written by men," says Zayyal.

"Additionally, when they try to write about subjects regarded as taboo in our conservative society, including incest or domestic violence, male editors either heavily edit the pieces or reject them," adds Zayyal.

"Men don't take us seriously as media professionals. We are regarded as a novelty. It is only recently that women started entering the profession. Before it was a completely male dominated field," says Samar Al Braimly, 29, who edits the magazine *Al Ghaida*.

"There is still a lot of discrimination. Women who work for government agencies are paid the same wages as men. But female freelancers and those working for private media organisations get significantly less than their male counterparts," Al Braimly told IPS.

Al Braimly says she overcomes restrictions placed on women moving in the streets at night and mixing with the opposite sex by getting first-hand reports from people involved in or witnessing breaking news.

"During the war I would wait for a period of calm and then make an appointment to meet people because I wouldn't have been able to go into the war zone as a woman. However, it is worth it in the end. Getting the story is so empowering."

Raheem Abdul Karim, the manager of Gaza's Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), is one of the few women who has risen to the top of her profession.

"Initially my male staff found it hard to take orders from a female boss. But eventually they respected my strength and the fact that I can do the job and do it well," Abdul Karim told IPS.

"Once a Hamas security man came to the office demanding we hand over a video. He refused to talk to me saying that he didn't talk to women." My staff had to explain that I was the manager and I was the only one with whom the issue could be broached," she said.

But Abdul Karim, 31, admits that there are times when gender inequity works in favour of women.

"I had a major confrontation with Hamas police on the Rafah border once. It got very heated but my male driver took the beating - not me." There are also times when it is easier to get into a conflict situation because women are perceived as less of a threat," comments Abdul Karim.

And like working women the world over, she feels torn between her career and her children.

"It was hell during the Gaza war when I had to report from the ground but I wasn't worried about spending quality time with my children." I was sick with worry as to whether the Israelis had bombed my home and if my children were still alive or wounded," Abdul Karim told IPS.

**By Mel Frykberg**

---

---

**P.S.**

\* Source: IPS.