

Palestinian Women's Organization

First Congress

Despite the extremely difficult situation of the Palestinian revolution generally, Palestinian women have continued their combined social and national struggle, to assert themselves in all fields and prove that they are a vital factor in the process of liberation. The convening of the first conference of the Palestinian Women's Organization, affiliated to the PFLP, is another manifestation of women's struggle.

The conference was held June 26-27th, under the slogan: For developing the Palestinian Women's Organization, enhancing the unity of the Palestinian women's movement within the General Union of Palestinian Women, and participating in reuniting the PLO on the basis of opposition to imperialism and Zionism. Comrade Leila Khaled opened the conference. The opening session was attended by delegations from various local, regional and international women's organizations.

The speech of the preparatory committee of the Palestinian Women's Organization (PWO) was delivered by its president, Comrade Samira Salah. She stressed that holding the conference was in itself an achievement, and that it was the culmination of the efforts of all branches of the PWO. She outlined the agenda of the conference as follows:

(a) discussion of the organizational report; (b) confirmation of the program for the coming four years; (c) adopting the internal rules and regulations; and (d) election of the general council. It was emphasized that the PWO is the result of the need for a broader democratic framework to encompass the increasing number of active women, and not a product of the crisis in the PLO and the General Union for Palestinian Women.

Other speakers at the opening session were: Comrade Widad Hilal of the General Union of Syrian Women; Comrade Zuhur Al Qadi of the General Secretariat of the GUPW; Comrade Butheina of the Iraqi Women's League; and Comrade Abu Ali Mustafa, Deputy General Secretary of the PFLP, whose speech is summarized below.

NO COMPLETE FREEDOM WITHOUT FREEDOM FOR WOMEN

Comrade Abu Ali Mustafa began his speech by expressing his deep respect and admiration for all the women who had expended efforts for making the first conference of the PWO possible. He also saluted the steadfast Palestinian women under Zionist occupation and in the Zionist jails. He saluted all militant Arab women and all women in the world who struggle for liberation, progress and democracy, who raise the banner of peace.

Comrade Abu Ali pointed out that this first conference should be modestly considered as the first step on a long, hard path of struggle towards complete liberation. The PWO should be considered as a suitable framework for women's struggle to achieve revolutionary goals. The revolutionary process is the joint responsibility of both men and women. Thus, the women's issue should not be dealt with apart from the overall process of liberation. The complexity and difficulty of this responsibility stems from the economic and social conditions, both of which impose barriers which hinder human progress and pose real challenges to all those who struggle for liberation.

Comrade Abu Ali pointed out how socialism has enabled women to progress at an enormous pace, while under the shackles of bourgeois societies women's progress is not only hindered, but they are considered the promoters of products if not commodities themselves. These same distorted values are being imported into our region by the bourgeois regimes, threatening our principles and everything national and wholesome. Again, in these societies, it is women who pay the highest price—not in cash, but in lack of freedom.

Comrade Abu Ali noted that his purpose was not to arouse fear, but to instill awareness of the dangers of these realities, so as to enable all to better protect our struggle and avoid illusions. He mentioned two unsound trends which are often encountered in dealing with the women's question: One is the trend which completely rejects whatever it considers unfavorable, calling for total rebellion and immediate, comprehensive solutions. The second is considering women's role as something insignificant, that women should not be included in the process of liberation; this presupposes that the liberation process falls on the shoulders of half the society only.

In contrast, the sound trend is characterized by constant work, step-by-step, to effect the needed cultural, economic and political changes, keeping in mind the dialectical relation between the task of national liberation and the task of social change. Such a view is imperative, because there is no complete freedom for any society without freedom for women. On the other hand, there is no such thing as a liberated woman outside the context of a liberated, democratic, socialist society. Moreover, the process of cultural, educational and political development should not be limited to women, but should involve men as well, to liberate them from limited horizons of understanding.

Comrade Abu Ali emphasized that in the light of the great national tasks facing us all, it is necessary to uphold the spirit of steadfastness and resistance in order to guarantee the continuity of the revolution. Thus, in this conference, the national issue cannot be overlooked, because it unites us in the struggle, requiring the efforts of both men and women. Suffering and death have become common to us all. "Not because of any lack of human feelings, but because we do have feelings like everyone else, we are even more determined to struggle until victory for our people, so that our children will live a normal life as they deserve. We are a people destined to sacrifice and we are convinced of the necessity of this sacrifice."

THE REVOLUTION WILL CONTINUE

Comrade Abu Ali emphasized that no one is under the illusion that the struggle will be over in a matter of years. "Yet without a doubt, a coming generation of our people will be victorious." He spoke of the reactionary regimes who are so brave when it comes to striking the people, but so cowardly when it comes to confronting the real enemy. These regimes fear the spread of revolution in the region, sparked by the Palestinian revolution. From this stems their attempt to cut the revolution down to size, but "our people and revolution will remain a thousand times larger than the size they cut out for us... We will strike at all who have the illusion that if they kill the Palestinians by the thousands, the revolution will end. This revolution will not end as long as our women have children!"

Comrade Abu Ali then spoke about the many attempts to contain or liquidate the revolution. "We have no illusions at this stage about effecting a dramatic strategic leap towards realizing our national program completely. We are, however, able to struggle effectively to abort enemy programs and plots, and these efforts will necessarily accumulate to give the revolution a positive boost forward." Abu Ali referred specifically to the Jordanian regime and the dangers posed by its continued