

Palestinian Women's Committees Congress

by Lina Al Aswad

On August 8th, in the Soviet Cultural Center in Damascus, President Laila Khaled opened the second general congress of the Palestinian Popular Women's Committees (formerly the Palestinian Women's Organization).

The opening session was attended by Dr. George Habash, general secretary of the PFLP, and a number of other PFLP leaders. Also attending were representatives of different Palestinian, Arab and international women's organizations, including the General Union of Palestinian Women, the Jordanian Women's League (RAMA), the Lebanese Women's Rights Committee and the International Democratic Women's Federation. Also present were Syrian MP Ferial Mahayni; Dr. Shafiq Sallah, representing UNICEF; Mahmoud Khaldi, head of the PLO office in Damascus; Lebanese nationalist MP Najah Wakeem and prominent Palestinian women militants, Samira Salah and Widad Qumari.

In the opening speech, Laila Khalid spoke about the significant role played by Palestinian women in exile in support of the uprising. She elaborated on the achievements of the Palestinian Women's Committees in the past four years, since its founding congress. She also emphasized the role of Palestinian women in the battle to defend the camps in Lebanon. To illustrate this point, Laila gave the example of the four members of the Palestinian Women's Committees who were martyred in defense of the camps.

In the next speech, Hind, who was representing the women's committees in the occupied territories, emphasized the distinguished role of Palestinian women in the intifada. She called for more support from outside for the sake of escalating the intifada.

Comrade Nihaya Mohamed, who was representing the General Union of Palestinian Women, called upon all Palestinian women to close ranks and join the union in order to mobilize all efforts for achieving the goals of freedom and independence.

Azza Mruweh, representing the Lebanese Women's Rights Committee, pointed to the role of Lebanese women in the battle for liberating the occupied South. She emphasized that their role complements that of Palestinian women in the confrontation against the US and Israeli schemes in the area.



Zahia Safa spoke about the role of the International Democratic Women's Federation in the struggle for realizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. She mentioned several examples of the federation's initiatives in support of the uprising and Palestinian women in the occupied territories.

Dr. Hanan Bouderi presented a speech on behalf of RAMA, focusing on the role of the Jordanian women's movement at this stage of consolidating democracy in Jordan; such consolidation will ultimately contribute to further support for the uprising.

The last speaker was Dr. George Habash who began by reaffirming that the uprising has provided Palestinian women with a golden opportunity to assume their rightful place in the national liberation process which will eventually lead to social liberation. Dr. Habash devoted the major part of his speech to talking about the achievements of the uprising, which thrust the

Palestinian cause into a new stage whereby the Palestinian state became a realistic possibility. He defined the tasks of the new stage to be carried out by the Palestinian masses in the 1948 and 1967 occupied territories and in exile, as well as the responsibilities of the Arab masses and governments. He also focused on the issue of democratic reform in the PLO, urging the speedy convening of a new PNC, so that the Palestinian leadership could seriously review its policies.

Regarding the Gulf crisis, Dr. Habash asserted that the Arab masses are experiencing a new imperialist attack targeting the whole area. He called on them to confront the imperialist military intervention.

The opening session concluded with a performance by the *Haneen* musical group.

Workshop discussions

The congress continued the next day with workshops in which there were lengthy discussions of the organization's activities, evaluating its progress in all fields since its formation in 1986. The discussions focused on the role of the Palestinian Women's Committees in developing the political consciousness of Palestinian women, and evaluated where the organization had excelled and where it had failed.

The participants unanimously confirmed the necessity of founding productive, rehabilitative and educational institutions for women. They emphasized the need to expand the Palestinian Women's Committees geographically and numerically, in order to mobilize all strata of Palestinian women in the national struggle.

The Palestinian Women's Committee's policy regarding the General

