

Vera Baboun



alestinian politician Vera Baboun is from Bethlehem. She is a mother of five and the widow of the martyr Hanna Ibrahim Baboun. Her life changed after the arrest of her husband, and she decided to continue her education at Bethlehem University where she obtained a bachelor's degree in English literature and then a master's degree in American ethnic literature. Baboun was a lecturer for 20 years in English language and literature at Bethlehem University, gave classes in the gender and development module for the university's graduate program MICAD, and served as headmistress of the Greek Catholic School in Beit Sahour. In October 2012 she became the city's first elected female mayor.

Being mayor of the city with the highest unemployment rate in Palestine, Baboun has been keen – throughout her journey – to give youth the space they need to excel in society. She has stated, “Youth are the backbone of our nation. We can change the future of society by involving them in the decision-making process.”

Strengthening women in their communities and enforcing their role is of equal importance to Baboun. She was part of the GRACE network of churches, and by contributing the chapter titled “Scheherazades of Today: Young Palestinian women use film, radio and social networking platforms to speak up and change,” she represented Palestine in the book that it published. Furthermore, she has participated in and spoken at conferences such as the Seventeenth Annual Women's Conference for Peace in the Middle East, “Women, Culture and Values: Building Lasting Peace in the Middle East” in Paris (2013), and the First Women Mayors' Summit in Avcilar, Turkey (2015). She also played a vital role in the G7 Summit in London (2015). In November 2016, she published a book entitled: *Pour L'amour de Bethléem: ma ville emmurée*.

Vera Baboun's intention of consolidating Bethlehem's culture and identity locally and internationally has made her the first mayor to pay special attention to the diaspora. She has visited Palestinian emigrants in Latin America and organized the First Bethlehem District Diaspora Convention.

Baboun believes in the universality of Bethlehem and desires to see it flourish; she has focused her efforts on attaining that goal. She has expanded Bethlehem's municipal borders (2016), realized a new organizational master plan (the previous plan dated from 1958), and improved municipal services.