



Women who make the change
Hiam Abbas

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ARTICLES

Because I Am a Man The Day Palestinian Men Stood Up for Gender Equality



By Eunjin Jeong

When at the launching of the Because I Am a Man campaign on February 19, 2018, in Al-Bireh, Palestine, a singer, a journalist, and two fathers from Palestine and Sweden came onto the stage to share their stories of how they contribute to empowering women at home and in the workplace, the audience held their breath. They did not want to miss a word from these male champions who have been pursuing paths and lives “less travelled” – at least in Palestine.

“Sharing caregiving roles at home is a must, not a choice,” said Said Mekahal, a Swedish man with a Palestinian background. Relating the experiences he had made when taking up a paternity leave in Sweden to take care of his family, he explained, “I started to understand my wife and my mother the first day I took care of my children at home.”

To Ehab Al-Jariri, the co-founder and chief editor of the radio station 24 FM – who has successfully advocated for the employment of more female journalists – hiring more women at workplaces is not only good for his company but also for the entire society. “Women are capable of everything men do, and should be given the same opportunity at work for the benefit of everyone,” he argued, emphasizing the social responsibility of employers to hire more women.

According to the Palestine Report of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in the Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA), 66 percent of the men surveyed in Palestine responded that they would like to have the option of paternal



A participant who signed the HeForShe commitment at the launching of the Palestine Report of IMAGES MENA.

Understanding Masculinities: International Men and Gender Equality Survey in the Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA) is the first study of its kind and size in the region, and examines men’s attitudes toward gender equality in four Arab countries, namely Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon.

leave. Furthermore, 63 percent of the surveyed men agreed or strongly agreed that a woman with the same qualifications can do as good a job as a man.

“Through the results of the Palestine report of the IMAGES MENA that is launched today, we found out that the majority of the surveyed men and women agreed that Palestinians need to extend more efforts to promote equality between women and men,” said Hadeel Abdo, project coordinator of the Men and Women for Gender Equality program at UN Women’s Palestine Office, who led the launching event. “Nonetheless, the fact that less than 20 percent of men and women believe that

men’s involvement in caregiving roles or other domestic chores is shameful is a hopeful sign, and can be considered a starting point on the road to achieving gender equality in Palestine by engaging both men and women,” she continued.

On the day of the event, eight large “Because I am man” billboard messages were put up in the major West Bank cities, featuring images of men who are advocating for gender equality in their daily lives. The Because I Am a Man campaign (#لاني_رجل) is in fact a regional campaign, currently rolled up in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco. It aims to change negative stereotypes associated



One of the billboard messages that were put up throughout West Bank as part of the Because I Am a Man campaign.



Preparing for the photo exhibition Palestinian Fathers was an enlightening experience for the Palestinian photographer Zaki Qutteineh.

with gender roles that reflect on perceptions and impact realities related to household- roles and responsibilities, fatherhood, violence against women, employment, and other topics.

“Because I Am a Man seeks not to remove the important voices of women, but rather to create a wider space for engaging in a dialogue around gender norms – and ultimately elevate us to a more equal society, wherein women and men, boys and girls have the same opportunities and responsibilities inside and outside the home,” said Mohammad Naciri, the regional director for Arab states at UN Women. He acknowledges that the evidence-based findings of IMAGES MENA confirmed the engrained social norms in the four Arab States surveyed.

To celebrate the launching of the Because I am a Man campaign, Bashar Murad, a young Palestinian singer, performed his new song by the same title (translation from Arabic).

I'm a Man, I respect her, I learn how to be powerful from her power

I'm a Man, I listen to her and she listen to me, I don't try to change her

We are equal

Besides, a short-animated film was screened on the evolving roles of members of an ordinary Palestinian family, seen from the perspective of a ten-year-old boy.

Furthermore, the global campaign titled HeForShe, a solidarity movement



The young Palestinian singer Bashar Murad sings a song titled “Because I am a man.”



Male champions from Palestine speak at the launching of the Because I Am a Man campaign.

initiated by UN Women, was launched for the first time in Palestine at this event. HeForShe aims to engage men and boys as equal partners of women and girls. Participants lined up to sign up for the HeForShe commitment, and took photos with a photo frame that features a self-drafted message of support. Since its launching in September 2014 at the United Nations by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Watson, hundreds of thousands of men from around the world have committed to gender equality worldwide, including heads of state, CEOs, and global luminaries from all walks of life.

Finally, two parallel photo exhibitions were staged at the event by UN Women in collaboration with the Consulate General of Sweden in Jerusalem, presenting images of Palestinian and Swedish fathers who are promoting gender equality through their actions in the home. The exhibitions aimed to highlight that entire families benefit when fathers are involved in every aspect of family life.

“The time that I spent with the participating fathers and their families was truly enlightening and heartwarming, to say the least. I genuinely felt strong bonds in all families, and I could imagine how huge the impact is that the father champions and their will have on future generations. These children will view their own parenthood differently,” said Zaki Qutteineh, the Palestinian photographer who prepared the photo exhibition Palestinian Fathers.

“We all agreed, however, that even though the road ahead looks promising, we still have a long and difficult way to go until we see more father champions in our community,” he continued, looking at photos of fathers who he called true champions.

Eunjin Jeong is the advocacy and communication officer at UN Women Palestine Office. She enjoys cycling around Jerusalem, taking photos of people on the street and discovering new travel destinations.

Article photos courtesy of United Nations UN Women, Eunjin Jeong, and the Empowerment of Women

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