



# GOALLLLL!!!

## PYSL Contributes to Increased Female Participation in Sports



**By Nader Atta**  
with support from Muna Araj

**A**cross the globe, sports are considered a means of unifying a nation under one flag. It offers the opportunity for citizens to stand united and sing their common national anthem. It is a means for men, women, and children, the young and the old, to cheer together and feel the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat. Stadiums and coliseums are full of people rooting together for their national team or favourite male and/or female athlete. An example of how sports can bridge gaps between people is the ongoing Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, where the North Korean and South Korean teams marched together under one flag – even though their countries have been divided since 1945 and in a state of war since 1950. This important step has now led the two leaders to agree to meet and talk, something that would have been unheard off just a couple of years, or even weeks ago.

With funding from the Government of Japan, UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People – in partnership with Al Quds University and the Palestinian Olympic Committee and in coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Education – has embarked on a new innovative approach to sports in the Arab region. It aims to attract the greatest number of boys and specifically girls, starting from a young age, to participate in a variety of sports activities, based on a year-round seasonal system. This approach will introduce and promote non-traditional sports, and it hopes to inspire young people, in particular females, to participate. And PYSL encourages families to attend their children’s games and/or volunteer their time.

The Palestinian Youth Sports League (PYSL) intends to become a community-based sports league that introduces a variety of sports to young male and female athletes, year-round. It is bent on fostering

**The Palestinian Youth Sports League (PYSL) launched its activities in 2017. It has registered 9,000 youth, 25 percent of which are girls and young women. New teams were formed in many sports disciplines, non-traditional sports were promoted, two new sports playgrounds were built, and for the first time, track and field events were organized in the West Bank and Gaza.**



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

that will open doors that are currently closed for girls and young women. The PYSL is a vehicle that will contribute to fostering Palestinian participation at the highest levels in regional and international competitions.

In 2017, PYSL pilot activities started in earnest after registering children and youth in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Very encouraging was the significant interest of young females who wanted to be part of the league and its various competitions. Out of about 9,000 youth that registered in total throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – including particularly

team-building and leadership skills in our children and youth and promoting family participation and volunteerism, and it wishes to identify future role models. The PYSL will become the feeding system for our club teams and federations. It is a system that will promote social cohesion and a process



Jericho, Ein Al-Beida, Immatain, and the middle area of Gaza – 25 percent are female. For many of them, this was the first time they had kicked a soccer ball, played volleyball and handball, shot basketball hoops, competed in bike races, and ran in short and long-distance races. What was extremely unlikely yesterday, has become possible now.

During the activities and competitions that took place during the pilot project year, we were humbled to see the smiles, energy, and enthusiasm of girls and boys eager to learn and compete in the different sports activities. In Jericho, Al-Bireh, and Tulkarem, female athletes participated for the first time



**A great transformation is taking place in Palestinian society, a transformation that will contribute to a strengthened Palestinian identity and to social cohesion. A transformation that is rooted in sports.**



in these races 23 new young people were chosen for participation in the national team, four of them girls and young women. One of the national team runners, who was identified through the PYSL competitions, is a 17-year-old from Gaza who received an Olympic Solidarity Scholarship to run in the 1500-meter race in the 2020 Olympics in Japan.

Thus, the transformation has begun. Being able to see Palestinian youth from Gaza and the West Bank unite for the first time, joined under the Palestinian flag in order to compete,

express how much they enjoy playing sports and want to continue training, makes us more determined than ever to make PYSL a household name. Girls who ride bikes, kick soccer balls, score goals and baskets, and slam down volleyballs are part of a social transformation. PYSL is opening new opportunities to engage in, and we look forward to the day when hopefully soon, a young male and/or female athlete will bring home a medal from the Olympics. This is an ultimate goal for the State of Palestine!

in local and national bike race competitions. In Ein Al-Beida, a community located in Area C of the Tubas District, and in Immatain, beautiful new multi-purpose sports playgrounds were constructed by UNDP – funded by Sweden, Austria, and Norway through the Community Resilience Development Programme (CRDP) – and became the setting where the PYSL kicked off league activities. For many of the girls, it was the first time they were playing in anything called sports. In Gaza, six clubs formed that not only introduce new sports activities but also for the first-time formed handball and basketball teams for girls.

Also for the first time, to conclude the first season of PYSL activities, the PYSL in coordination with the Palestinian Athletic Federation organized a series of regional track and field competitions in the West Bank and Gaza. They drew hundreds of male and female youth athletes, and culminated in December 2017 with the first national championship that identified the ones who were the fastest and had the most stamina. As a result of the races, 125 new runners were identified, 20 of which are females who are practicing as new teams in clubs associated with the federation in the West Bank. Moreover,



*Born and raised in the United States, Nader Atta is presently living in the Palestinian city of Al-Bireh. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in international relations from George Mason University and a Master of Technology from North Carolina State University. As a young adult, he was one of the founding members of ROOTS, a Palestinian-American Youth Organization based in Washington DC. Since 1995, Mr. Atta has been working with the United Nations Development Programme/ Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) in various capacities. Currently, he is deputy team leader of the governance and social development unit.*

was an emotional moment that will not be forgotten. PYSL is contributing to social cohesion. Watching young girls in Ein Al-Beida, and hearing them

Article photos courtesy of PYSL.