

By Dalal Iriqat

LAILA GHANNAM

Napoleon Bonaparte described a successful leader as a merchant of hope, the leader who not only leads the people but shows them the best path into their future. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Laila Ghannam – governor of Ramallah and Al-Bireh – is spreading hope free of charge, with charisma, a charming smile, and a humble sense of humor that touches every soul. She considers her mission in life to give on all levels through whatever position she might occupy.

Laila, who sits on the board of trustees of the Arab American University - Palestine, obtained a bachelor of arts degree from Al-Quds Open University and a master of arts from Al-Quds University in Abu Dis, both in social service, before she went to Egypt to successfully pursue her PhD in mental health at Minya University. She started her career as a nursery school teacher in her home village Deir Dibwan and then worked at the Abu Raya program for special needs, after which she moved on to work in the international relations department of the intelligence services.

Laila's career in politics began when she took up work on the local elections committee. Afterwards, she moved to the Ministry of Social Affairs and then became vice governor for six months before she was appointed governor of Ramallah and Al-Bireh in 2010. The first woman to occupy this post in Palestine, Laila has successfully lowered the glass ceiling, paving the way for women to assume their proper roles.

Family is a priority for Laila, and she credits her success to the support she receives from her family. Her nieces are her source of inspiration, and she enjoys a magical ability to treat people like family. Laila's charm lies in her simplicity, her down-to-earth style, and her listening abilities. Her soft heart and sharp mind are the source of her capacity to patiently communicate with everybody. She strikes a rare balance between emotion and reason.

Photo by Bara' Daraj.



Photo by Arine Rimawi.



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Laila is seen everywhere, be it with children, the elderly, in hospitals, or on the streets. You will find her in an opening ceremony or at a funeral, spreading positive vibes among the crowds. Comforting the exhausted and helping the poor, she celebrates and mourns with the people of Ramallah and Al-Bireh.

Yasser Arafat is her role model. When a leader once proposed to her, she answered: "The one person whom I might be with is gone!" referring to Yasser Arafat. On another occasion, Ghannam mentioned that her role models include the mother of the martyr who endures the parting of her son, the mother of the prisoner who suffers terribly while she waits for her son or daughter to visit, female prisoners, women farmers who sell their products by the roadside to support their families, students who work to finance their studies, traffic police who endure harsh weather conditions to serve their people, and the entire Palestinian people who cling to hope despite their pain.*

While everyone seems to love Laila, more importantly, she commands respect, not only in her

governorate but in all of Palestine. She has certainly proven her worth in leadership with a passionate style that is driven by love, wisdom, and prudence. She reminds every leader that people are the source and base for successful leadership.

Leadership is about turning challenges into gains, and this can be achieved by strategic planning that transforms opportunities into strengths. Congratulations to Dr. Laila Ghannam (and to all women in Palestine), as during this corona crisis, she has brilliantly managed to confront every challenge and turn it into an asset – she is living proof of the full potential, efficiency, and productivity of women in senior positions. Leadership is a mixture of strategy and personality, but if the leader must choose one over the other, then better to abandon strategy and stick to personality, such as Governor Ghannam has done with charisma, touching the heart of every Palestinian.

*Read more at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/palestine-first-female-governor-ghannam.html#ixzz6KHm9bdQ2>.

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