



CEPPS/IRI West Bank-Gaza Quarterly Report: April 1-June 30th, 2005
West Bank-Gaza: Women's Empowerment Project/ MIFTAH
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I. SUMMARY:

In cooperation with the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), IRI is imparting important leadership, political, and communications skills to Palestinian women. In Phase II of the Women's Empowerment Project, IRI and MIFTAH are addressing the gender deficit in local politics through a support network for Palestinian women interested in assuming a more prominent role in public life. Building upon the success of the first phase of the project, Phase II more intensively supports prospective women candidates who intend to run for local and/or national office in the coming year. The primary vehicle for this support are nine local Women's Electoral Support Points (WESPs), which provide ongoing support, training, and consultations for women candidates, as well as facilitate networking, media contacts, and community outreach.

In the first quarter of the project, WESP coordinators initiated voter registration, awareness-raising and initial candidate support for municipal elections. In the second quarter of the project, the coordinators at the WESPs worked intensively with candidates to prepare them for the first round of municipal council elections, held on December 23, 2004, in 26 municipalities throughout the West Bank, and on January 27, 2005, in 10 municipalities in Gaza. In early December, just weeks before the election, an amendment was passed to the local elections law which set aside two seats for women in every elected council (where women were running). WESP coordinators worked individually and collectively in eight locations with over 80 women candidates; 15 of these women won seats in local councils in the West Bank and five won seats in Gaza.

During the current quarter, IRI staff and volunteer trainer conducted intensive, two-day trainings in Ramallah, Nablus, and Gaza for nearly 60 prospective women candidates who intend to run in Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. The trainings addressed topics including campaign planning and strategy, message development, and voter outreach. Attendees included women leaders who are heads of non-government organizations (NGOs), government employees, university professors, lawyers, and medical doctors.

II. BACKGROUND:

The call to reform Palestinian governing institutions is not a new one, yet following the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in November 2004, and the Palestinian Presidential election in early January 2005, there is a sense of urgency and optimism among the Palestinian public. The political dynamics in the West Bank and Gaza have shifted and key issues of reform, transparency, elections, and citizen participation that have been debated for years – but sidelined by entrenched political interests – have now surfaced on the political agenda. This transition has given rise to new opportunities for political change that must be capitalized upon, and in this process women can and should play a greater role in shaping the direction of Palestinian political discourse.

The challenges that women face to become more fully integrated into the political process and to assume positions of real decision-making authority are still significant. In January 1996, 676 candidates stood for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Despite comprising 42% of the electorate and polling data that showed significant levels of support for women's participation in elected office, only 27 women ran for the Council with five eventually attaining office. According to the head of the Jerusalem Center for Women, speaking in February 1996, the poor showing by women in the elections was due as much to “financial restrictions” and “the constituency system” as it was to “the patriarchal nature of society which bars women from decision-making positions.” Before the current round of municipal elections began, Palestinian women faced similar constraints and held only 22 of 3,439 local council seats – barely more than half of a percentage point.

While the situation for Palestinian women has certainly improved since 1996, many of the obstacles cited still remain paramount. Palestinian women have made great strides in advancing their political agenda and achieving a quota for women in locally elected bodies, yet considerable barriers still exist to broader participation beyond the elite. Addressing this issue must equip women with the skills and the self-confidence to become elected representatives and also challenge traditional attitudes that still question women's political leadership. In this crucial period of transition, and with the promise of Palestinian legislative elections on the horizon, the integration of women in the political arena has never been more important.

The women's rights community has been actively working to expand the space for women's leadership, and the first round of municipal council elections held in December/January in 36 municipalities offered women candidates their first opportunity to test the new political waters. In a remarkable victory for women activists and the National Committee for the Promotion of Women in Elections a long-fought battle resulted in a quota that allocates two seats for women (where women are running) on every council. While imperfect, the quota will help overcome traditional barriers to women's political participation, and those elected will prove critics that women can, and should, contribute equally.

The first round of local elections demonstrated Palestinians' commitment to the democratic process with over 81% of the 144,000 eligible voting in this election; of whom 49% of the voters were women. Over 200 women candidates ran in the election, and the quota helped ensure that 70 women gained seats on the councils (50 in the West Bank and 20 in Gaza). The second round of municipal elections was held in 84 municipalities throughout the West Bank and Gaza on May 5th, and 399 women entered as candidates. Of these, 168 women won seats out of total of 907 available seats, resulting in 18.5% representation on the councils. Both rounds garnered significant attention due to Hamas' surprising display of

electoral strength in both the West Bank and Gaza, however, the unprecedented level of women's participation is a noteworthy achievement.

The remaining rounds of municipal council elections are due to be completed by December 2005. While the political and security environment pose significant challenges for the potential impact of such elections, local elections offer an opportunity and may help build momentum for broader reform efforts. Since traditional norms – particularly in small towns and villages in the West Bank and Gaza – still threaten women's ability to become public leaders, local elections offer a unique chance for women to challenge these notions, present themselves as viable candidates, and enter the political playing field.

At the same time, preparations are underway for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, initially scheduled for July 17, 2005 but now postponed without a set date. Civil society groups, political parties, academics, and key decision-makers are working together and with PLC members to make substantive changes to the electoral law that governs the conduct of PLC elections. In late June, the PLC and President Abbas agreed up an electoral law that would expand the number of total seats to 144, and would elect 50% of the seats based on proportional party lists and 50% based on district voting. The new electoral law stipulates a 20% quota for women on the party lists, and lowers the minimum age of candidates to 28 years.

Despite the uncertainty regarding the timing, administration, and legal framework governing legislative elections over the past several months, prospective women candidates have been positioning themselves to launch campaigns. Candidates have been networking within their political parties, building support for their candidacies and identifying campaign managers and others to be part of campaign teams. It is clear that dozens, if not hundreds, of women will present themselves as candidates for PLC electoral races – whether on party lists, as independents, or as district candidates –and will achieve a greater level of representation for women.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

Efforts this quarter were dually aimed at identifying and training candidates running in the May 5th round of local elections, as well as supporting women who intend to run in PLC elections that were expected to be held on July 17th. Uncertainty surrounding the timing of PLC elections and a new electoral law made specific campaign activities difficult, but training and meetings proceeded with the assumption of an impending election date. MIFTAH staff and WESP coordinators organized trainings for candidates and campaign managers, hosted community meetings to build support and awareness about women's participation, and sponsored workshops with current elected officials to benefit from their insights and experience. Additionally, IRI staff and volunteer trainer Virginia Wolfe conducted media and communications skills training in late-May in Ramallah and Gaza City for 45 women candidates who intend to run for PLC seats.

In addition to candidate support through workshops and trainings, the WESP coordinators also provided detailed and accurate information to candidates and women's groups in the different localities related to local and national elections (processes for candidacy, voting validity, registration process, etc.).

Candidate Identification and Training:

Municipal Council Elections

In February, MIFTAH staff and WESP coordinators began working to prepare women candidates for the second round of local council elections scheduled for May 5th to be held in 84 localities in the West Bank and Gaza. Once the municipalities for the second round were announced, WESP coordinators contacted local women leaders, representatives of the Local Elections High Committee, and political party representatives in order to begin identifying qualified women who would be interested and willing to run. The coordinators initiated a thorough process of identifying and selecting qualified women candidates that would receive support from the project. After the great success of MIFTAH candidates in the first round of local elections, there was a very high demand from women interested in being a part of the MIFTAH project.

In order to equip women with the knowledge and confidence needed to seek representation on local councils, the WESP coordinators helped educate potential candidates and other women leaders about the mandate, roles, and responsibilities of the local councils. To that end, the WESP coordinators organized a series of workshops and public meetings that discussed:

- Role of the municipalities in development and the type of services to be provided;
- The decision-making process in municipalities and the problems that appointed women faced; and
- Women's contributions and expected role in municipal councils.

In mid-April, MIFTAH organized a two-day training on campaign planning for municipal council candidates at each of the WESPs. Held in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, Tulkaram, Gaza City and southern Gaza, 101 women candidates participated in the program. The topics discussed were identifying community issues, message development, and campaign strategy and planning.

District	Gaza City	Jenin	Tulkarem	Southern Gaza	Nablus	Hebron	Ramallah	Jerusalem
Dates	Apr 6-7	Apr 5-6	Apr 8-9	Apr 9-10	Apr14-10	Apr 12-13	Apr 6-7	Apr 9-10
Participants	17	13	19	11	15	19	12	23

Later in the month, a one-day training session on communications and media skills was conducted at each WESP by a local media specialist to help prepare candidates for public speaking and media opportunities. More than 140 women throughout the West Bank and Gaza participated in this training.

District	Southern Gaza	Jenin	Tulkarem	Bethlehem	Nablus	Hebron	Ramallah	Jerusalem
Dates	Apr 24	Apr13	Apr14	Apr26	Apr21	Apr17	Apr21	Apr24
Participants	9	19	19	21	15	19	18	23

MIFTAH also hosted a number of community meetings to build support for women candidates. These meetings took place in urban centers and more rural areas, including: Jerusalem (4/12/05), Bethlehem (4/19/05), Kufer Malek/Ramallah (4/13/2005), KufurDan/

Jenin (4/9/05), Kufur Rai'/Jenin (4/11/05), Budrus/Ramallah (4/28/2005), Sabastia/Nablus (18/4/2005), Nablus (4/27/05).

These meetings were an important opportunity for women candidates to introduce themselves to the community, and to address the topic of increasing women's political participation, including:

- Utilizing national women leaders to support women candidates for local elections
- Supporting independent candidates and assisting in financial support
- Building support from civil society organizations for women candidates
- Challenging the negative stereotype towards women's involvement in the public life
- Raising awareness about the importance of women's representation in the municipalities
- Coordinating the efforts of women's organizations in supporting women's candidacies

In addition to formal trainings and workshops, the coordinators also spent considerable time providing individualized support for each candidate. The WESP coordinators respond to specific inquiries regarding campaigning, building coalitions and targeting constituencies. The coordinators maintain close contact with the candidates through ongoing personal visits and calls to the candidates in order to discuss their campaign plans, to keep candidates informed of updates issued by Ministry of Local Governance, Local Elections Commission and Central Election Commission, and to facilitate candidates' participation in different activities (public meetings, debates, and workshops) organized by other institutions. The coordinators play a particularly important role by intervening in instances where candidates are being threatened or intimidated by families or competitors not to run in the election. For example, in Gaza, the MIFTAH coordinator was successful in persuading the son-in-law of a woman candidate not to oppose her bid for a seat on the local council.

As the election neared, WESP coordinators and MIFTAH staff helped to facilitate the appearance of women candidates in the press by helping to arrange interviews for them with daily newspapers, news websites, and local TV and radio stations. In total, 399 female candidates ran for elections out of 2519 candidates, and the competition between them was very strong. 188 women won seats which amounts to almost 18% of the total number of seats. Of the women candidates that entered the race, MIFTAH trained and supported 186, and of these candidates 81 MIFTAH candidates were successful in their bids for seats on their local councils. Upon the announcement of the results, the coordinators followed up with the women and helped answer legal queries for those who decided to take legal action through court.

In order to highlight the achievements of women who entered the first and second rounds of local elections, MIFTAH organized celebrations in Gaza on May 16, 2005 and in Ramallah on May 20, 2005. More than 150 participants attended each event and represented different local institutions, elected female members of municipalities, legislators, representatives of political parties, and representatives of the High Local Elections Committee. The events were an opportunity to celebrate the victory of the winning candidates and to honor the courage of female candidates who ran in both rounds despite significant social and political obstacles. The celebrations received widespread media coverage by local media, including daily newspapers and local television stations such as Al Fajer TV (Tulkarem) and Gama TV (Nablus), in addition to the satellite channels and the national television.

PLC Elections

Since January, IRI and MIFTAH have been working with a core group of women candidates who intend to run for PLC elections. Through pre-existing contacts, new outreach, and women's networks, WESP coordinators identified a group of approximately 60 women leaders that would work consistently with MIFTAH in the pre-election period. These potential candidates were selected on the basis of several criteria: their commitment to women's rights and service to the community, their commitment to the democratic process, and their likelihood of winning the election. Once these prospective candidates were identified, the WESP coordinators used questionnaires to conduct an initial needs assessment and evaluation to identify strengths and weakness. Based on this information, IRI and MIFTAH staff developed a strategy and timeline for assistance and skills training.

In April, the coordinators continued providing potential PLC candidates with updates regarding developments in the electoral law, opportunities to interact with media, and ideas for community networking and coalition building. In order to give those candidates a framework and introduce them to their constituencies, MIFTAH invited them to be main speakers in educational workshops and public meetings organized either by MIFTAH. In addition, MIFTAH nominated several potential candidates to participate in a training conducted by U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem on 12/4/2005 entitled "Networking and Cooperation: Advancing Women's Involvement in Political Life".

In May, the coordinators organized educational workshops at each of the WESPs to raise their awareness about their expected roles as legislators. At these workshops, current members of the PLC spoke about their own experiences and discussed their roles as legislators. They also discussed topics pertaining to the rule of law, separation of powers, and the role of the parliament, its committees and members in the legal, political and social arenas. At the end of the workshops, the coordinators distributed documents, regulations and laws pertaining to the Legislative Council's working mechanisms. These workshops were held in Jerusalem/Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem and Gaza City, and were attended by 79 prospective PLC candidates.

Educational Workshops

District	Gaza city	Jenin	Tulkarem	Nablus	Bethlehem	Ramallah and Jerusalem
Dates	May 17	May 9	May 6	May 12	May 17	May 3
Participants	15	18	12	10	9	15

In order to respond most effectively to the training needs of PLC candidates, MIFTAH and IRI outlined a training schedule that utilizes the experience and expertise of both local trainers and international IRI trainers. Decentralized trainings with local trainers were held in May for coalition-building and public speaking. The timing of the coalition-building workshop was appropriate as the women are currently testing their opportunities in forming coalitions for those that are part of political parties. The trainer used a series of exercises to assess the strengths of each candidate in that regard.

Coalition-Building Training

District	Tulkarem and Jenin	Bethlehem and Hebron	Nablus	Ramallah and Jerusalem
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Dates	May 16	May 21	May 13	May 19
Participants	10	8	11	12

A one-day training workshop on public speaking skills was conducted for the same group of candidates. In response to the target group's request, the trainer concentrated on the practical application.

Public Speaking Training

District	Tulkarem and Jenin	Bethlehem and Hebron	Nablus	Ramallah and Jerusalem
Dates	May 17	May 25	May 14	May 31
Participants	10	8	11	10

In order to help the candidates' support teams, MIFTAH conducted a two-day training session for campaign managers that sought to build skills and capacity in managing campaigns. The training covered the following topics: message development, crafting the campaign strategy and tactics, designing the campaign plan, and recruiting the campaign team and volunteers. At the end of the session, the coordinators and the trainers made an assessment of the skills and capacities of trainees in order to help candidates select qualified campaign managers.

Campaign Managers' Training

Place and Date	Jerusalem May 28-29	Ramallah June 20-21, 26	Tulkarem June 22-23	Jenin June 26-27	Nablus June 23-25	Bethlehem June 28-29
Participants	15	17	19	18	17	15

In this quarter, IRI directly contributed to training PLC candidates with a centralized, two-day training in late May to develop skills related to media outreach and communications. IRI staff and media specialist Virginia Wolfe conducted the training in Gaza City for 16 candidates from Rafah, Khan Younis and Gaza City, and then repeated in Ramallah for 20 candidates from Nablus, Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem, and Ramallah. The media and communications training focused on the following topics:

- Advanced messaging for campaigning
- Media Opportunities in Campaigning
- Media Strategy: paid vs. earned media
- Radio/Television interviewing
- Projecting a positive image
- Public speaking basics

The media training utilized interactive activities, role-playing, and group work. Each candidate was asked to prepare one-minute campaign speeches, which were recorded on video, reviewed, and critiqued. The trainer, staff, and participants gave constructive advice to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and then a second opportunity was given to revise and improve the message and delivery. In one session, the participants practiced radio and television interviewing skills in a talk-show simulation, and in another

session, participants worked as campaign teams to respond to a public relations crisis in a role-playing exercise.

Most of the participants attended the previous IRI-led training on campaign planning in February, which offered IRI staff a unique opportunity to continue building relationships with key women leaders in multiple cities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. These candidates demonstrated a strong commitment and determination to enter positions of political leadership and benefited from the continued support MIFTAH and IRI.

MIFTAH continues to work on raising public awareness on the necessity of political participation, women's involvement in the electoral process, and encouraging women's registration for elections (the Central Election Committee reopened the registration) by coordinating large public meetings in each district in coordination with local organizations. At each meeting, the coordinators facilitated the involvement of potential PLC candidates as speakers to give them the opportunity and the space to interact with people in the local communities. Such meetings were held in Nuba-Hebron (5/24), Halhul-Hebron (5/29), Abassan/Gaza (5/26), Jeeb/Jerusalem (5/31), Jenin Camp/Jenin (5/22), and Burqeen /Jenin (5/25). Approximately 35-50 participants attended each of these public meetings.

Individual Candidate Support

In addition to workshops and formal training session, WESP coordinators devote considerable time and energy to provide candidates with guidance and consultation on an ongoing basis to encourage, sustain, and strengthen their campaigns. WESP coordinators conducted meetings with individual candidates to review campaign strategies and messages and draft a timeline and outreach plan. Through contact by phone and in person, the coordinators provided the following support for both municipal council and PLC candidates:

- Updating candidates continuously on changes to the electoral law, new procedures, and developments from the Ministry of Local Government, the Local Elections Commission, and the Central Elections Commission.
- Connecting candidates with legal aid organizations and the Local Elections High Committee in order to answer questions related to registration procedures and regulations as well as assist with any difficulties encountered during the campaign.
- Lobbying political parties to nominate qualified women candidates with the potential of winning (in some locations political parties contacted MIFTAH coordinators seeking recommendations for women whom they could support).
- Facilitating and ensuring candidates' participation in election-related activities (public meetings, debates, and workshops) organized by other organizations (such as the Women's Affairs Technical Committee and Civic Forum).
- Providing a space for candidates to introduce themselves in the local media through TV programming (especially at Al-Fajer and Al-Farah TV stations), in addition to arranging interviews for a number of candidates to be broadcast on some satellite channels.
- Helping identify and secure sources of financial assistance to cover the fee required to register as a candidate.

Advocacy

In addition to the work of the WESPs, MIFTAH staff and leadership also continued to actively participate in two important civil society coalitions: the National Committee for the Promotion of Women in Elections and the Civil Society Committee for Elections, which channels the concerns of civil society organizations on issues related to local and national-level elections.

During this quarter, debate regarding the electoral law was at its height and the Civil Society Committee for Elections in Ramallah and Gaza met on a weekly basis to discuss the latest developments on the electoral law and implementation of its lobbying campaign. MIFTAH was actively involved in these efforts, and participated in intensive lobbying efforts to press for important changes.

In April, the electoral law passed its third reading, but was considered disappointing by political parties and civil society organizations, since it favored district over proportional list representation and did not include a quota for women. In response, the Committee formulated a statement with all demands related to the electoral law and collected signatures from different organizations, political parties and community leaders. The statement was delivered to the President, who is the sole figure with the authority to modify the law. As a compromise, the Committee proposed adaptation of the mixed system (50% of the seats for districts, 50% for proportion lists with 20% quota for women).

In its final form, President Abbas submitted amendments in line with these recommendations, and the PLC approved those amendments in the presence of civil society representatives (including MIFTAH) on June 18, 2005. The new law increases the number of seats from 88 to 132 (50% decided by district voting and 50% based on party lists), includes a women's quota of 20% for the party lists and reduces the minimum age of candidacy to 28 years.

V. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Result #1 The establishment of a network of women's leadership centers in major Palestinian population centers to encourage the increased participation of women in politics and decision-making positions;

Indicator #1: Women's Electoral Support Points (WESPs) are operational in the following areas: Ramallah, Jerusalem/Jericho, Jenin, Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem, Tulkaram/Qalqilia, North Gaza, and South Gaza.

Indicator #2: Decentralized WESP offices established in the primary population centers address the reality of travel restrictions between and within the West Bank and Gaza by allowing for direct support of women leaders by the local coordinators.

Result #2 The institutional capacity of civil society organizations is strengthened to provide continued support for women's leadership and political activism;

Indicator #1: MIFTAH has assumed a coordination role among the WESPs to ensure consistent communication, reporting, and assistance mechanisms, which strengthens MIFTAH's internal organizational capacity.

Indicator #2: The presence of MIFTAH coordinators at the WESPs helps extend the grassroots reach of MIFTAH into more rural, marginalized communities of women.

Result #3 Technical assistance and training is extended to Palestinian women seeking to enhance leadership skills, develop political expertise, and prepare for local and national electoral campaigns;

Indicator #1: WESP coordinators worked intensively with over 150 women candidates to help them prepare for the second round of municipal elections held in 84 municipalities in the West Bank and Gaza. Of the 167 women that won seats, MIFTAH trained and supported 76 of them.

Indicator #2: WESP coordinators identified a core group of women candidates to support for upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections and are providing individualized and group support through consultations, skills training, workshops and discussion groups.

Indicator #3: In order to build the capacity of potential PLC-election candidates, IRI staff and volunteer trainer Virginia Wolfe conducted two-day training sessions in Ramallah and Gaza City on media and

communications skills for 45 women leaders in the West Bank and Gaza.