

## ***World Premier of ♦ Women in Struggle ♦ highlights the Palestinian Women Prisoner Movement***

By Genevieve Cora Fraser

Any Palestinian who involves themselves in the national struggle for independence takes a risk whether their role is non-violent or an act of resistance against the brutality of the nearly four decades old Israeli occupation. The documentary film **♦ Women in Struggle ♦** tracks the lives of four ex-political detainees, women who were not only involved in violent aspects of the national struggle but paid the price by serving time in jail. Utilizing filmmaking techniques where each character is followed separately, the story unfolds not only in the lives of the subjects but as they experience changes taking place in Palestine, including the most recent Intifada. Archival footage and black & white photos document the credibility of their involvement. Produced, directed and filmed by Buthina Canaan Khoury, the movie debuts on Tuesday, August 17<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM at Al Kasaba in Ramallah.

Aysha, a fifty-three year old divorcee, lives by herself in a small village near Ramallah. Throughout the years, Aysha has changed her political views. She was captured in the early 70 ♦s after planting a bomb where Israelis were killed and many others were injured. She was sentenced to life in an Israeli prison and served ten years before being released. Following her release, she lived in exile for many years and returned to Palestine after the Oslo Peace Agreement. Rasmieh was Aysha's comrade in planning the bomb attack. She was captured and tortured with Aysha and spent ten years in prison as Aysha did and was released with her during the first exchange of detainees between the PLO and the Israeli government. She is now a lawyer.

Rawda is a heavy set woman in her late 40 ♦s who has been disowned and abandoned by her family because of the choices she has made in her life. As she prepared a military operation in her home in Jerusalem, a bomb prematurely exploded injuring her and several of her compatriots. Others from her political group died in the explosion. Rawda not only married an ex-detainee, but a Muslim outside of her religion. Because of the physical torture they experienced while incarcerated, they were unable to have children and so adopted a child. Her life has strayed far from what would be considered the traditional path for a Palestinian woman.

Terry and Rawda are close friends. However, unlike Rawda, her several incarcerations have been short in duration. Terry followed in Rawda's footsteps by marrying outside her religion. Today she lives in Jerusalem and carries a Jerusalem ID and is married to a man from Abu-Dees in the West Bank next to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, Israel has chosen to build the Apartheid Wall next to her house. With ever new and continuous changes in Israeli laws, her husband lives under the threat of eviction from his own house which would split the family. They have two daughters.

◆ *Women in Struggle* ◆ is an up-close and personal look at a reality that is rarely examined in depth, namely the Palestinian Women Prisoner Movement. Since 1968 about 10,000 Palestinian women have been detained by Israel. For many years these political detainees were placed in the same jails as common criminals. In an effort to improve their conditions the women organized hunger strikes and used other pressure tactics with the Israeli prison administration to negotiate the rights and needs of women detainees. A council was organized and a political movement was born behind bars.

According to Khoury, in an effort to break the women and humiliate them into confessions, many were made to suffer through a variety of torture tactics including threatened and attempted rape along with physical and psychological torture used to terrorize them. ◆ Physical torture included being forbidden to see family, to eat, to sleep, to socialize and even to sit. This type of torture also meant that many women had to stand for a long time with a dark dirty bag covering their head and face, with hands and legs cuffed, ◆ she stated. ◆ Although it did not leave immediate physical marks on their bodies, it caused painful humiliation and different long term diseases such as rheumatism, disk, ulcers, and affected blood pressure. Furthermore, using loud music, different crying voices, listening to others being tortured and being physically beaten in different parts of their bodies was used intensively against the detainees, ◆ the filmmaker explained.

In 1996, following the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement many of the women detainees took a now legendary stand. Using the slogan, "no peace without the release of all women and men detainees," they refused to be released in small groups. As a result their release was delayed an extra four months. However, only the women prisoners were successful in winning their release at that time.

Due to the failure of the peace process the last page of the book in the struggle of women detainees has not yet been written, Khoury acknowledged. Palestinian women still suffer inside Israeli prisons, but make an effort to preserve their dignity and integrate into the social and political aspects of Palestinian life. ♦ Although these four women are out of the actual Israeli prison they find themselves in a bigger prison carrying ♦ prison ♦ within them in every aspect of their life, ♦ Khoury stated.

Buthina Canaan Khoury established Majd Production Company in Palestine in the year 2000. As an independent filmmaker, her intent is to produce documentaries about different and vital Palestinian issues. She has over fourteen years of experience in the media field working as the first Palestinian camera woman, producer and coordinator covering special events in the Middle East for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and other well known European TV stations. She holds a bachelor degree in filmmaking and photography from Boston, Massachusetts. ♦ **Women in Struggle** ♦ is her first one hour documentary.

♦ **Women in Struggle** ♦ was co-produced by Lichtpunt Begium. The film was edited by Saed Andoni, with music by Wasim Kassis. Medea Spain funded the project. For further information, contact Majd production Co., Taybeh - Ramallah /Palestine. Telefax: 972 2 289 80 22 /289 8868; Email - [buthinack@hotmail.com](mailto:buthinack@hotmail.com)