



Participants, Trainers and Staff of the FES

Jericho. August 21st, 2007. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Jerusalem and the Birzeit University Center for Continuing Education bid farewell on Tuesday to the twenty-two outstanding women who completed the pilot Women's Leadership Program. The handpicked participants participated in comprehensive seminars in Jericho and Ramallah designed to enhance their leadership skills. With the program, the FES and Birzeit seek to strengthen leaders who shall promote rational, principled and forward-looking approaches to their professions, communities and families.

The women chosen to participate run the gamut of Palestinian society. Christian and Muslim participants represented Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Gaza and elsewhere. While some are still completing university studies, others have several years of professional experience. Across religious, geographic and professional lines each woman was selected to participate on the basis of her achievements. One participant is completing her PhD in the United Kingdom. Another is a regional manager in telecommunications. Many are working mothers also involved in community service or politics. They are among the most driven and engaged women in the Palestinian Territories and are not only capable, but eager and committed to improving themselves and their communities.



Over the course of the training program the topic of leadership was explored from a multiple angles. Facilitators from Birzeit lead discussions and workshops on teamwork, public speaking, time management and more. Guest speakers also enriched the program. In his address to the women, the Honorable Afif Safeih, the representative of the PLO to the United States, expressed his hope that the participants would be agents of change through democratic, popular and non violent means. "Optimists make history" he said as he made his case for overcoming a culture of pessimism within Palestinian society. "Politics" he reminded the audience "is too important to be left to politicians alone. It is about people, not power."

Upon departure each woman prepared and presented a statement in which she assessed herself as well as the program. The overwhelming majority expressed a willingness to implement the leadership skills and assessment techniques they learned for personal benefit. Moreover, they communicated a desire to remain actively involved with the other participants in order to revisit the lessons of the week and share experiences as they return to their careers, families and communities. Sustainable commitment to the principles of leadership, one reflected participant reflected, is a process- not an event.



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Birzeit University could not agree more. Moving forward, the FES will not only draw from participants' feedback to improve upcoming programs, but plans to remain in touch with the participants and promote an alumnae network that allows for continuous exchange and network building among community and political leaders.