



**A Spectrum of Light in the  
Middle East**

January - February 2004

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### **About The Prism Group**

The Prism Group continues to focus on several key issues and is pleased to see that its efforts are causing "spectrums of awareness" in many places. Our reports have been shared with a number of important government and political leaders around the world and we continue to receive inquiries and comments.

### **Freedom of the Press**

Press freedom and the integrity of reporting, especially relating to the Middle East, has been a recent worldwide focus. The UK is still absorbing the findings of the Hutton report, where BBC journalists were found to have failed to maintain standards of accuracy and had even introduced their own biases.

Ironically, the BBC had already been publicly scrutinised only a few weeks previously. Robert Kilroy-Silk was fired immediately for slamming the governments of some Arab states for their support of homicide bombings, using amputation as a punishment, for repression of women and for a generally celebratory attitude towards September 11. Not only did this seem to strike against the idea of freedom of expression, it also sharply contrasted with recent comments by Tom Paulin. Using the BBC, he had strongly rebuked Jewish settlers in the West Bank – and called for the murder of Jews. Paulin's actual words were: "Brooklyn-born" Jewish settlers on the West Bank "should be shot dead" because "they are Nazis" and "I feel nothing but hatred for them". Paulin's comments barely raised an eyebrow amongst his editors.

It is interesting that Kilroy-Silk is not alone in making his observations. According to Ibrahim Nawar of Arab Press Freedom Watch, in the last two years seven Saudi editors have been fired for criticising government policies. "To fire a British talk-show host for criticising Saudi policies is surely over-reaching even for the notoriously super-sensitive Muslim lobby." The columnist Mark Steyn was so concerned about events at the BBC, that he wrote in The Daily Telegraph: "One reason why the Arab world is in the state it's in is because one cannot raise certain subjects without it impacting severely on one's wellbeing. And if you can't discuss issues, they don't exist."

**Everyone's a martyr says PA.** Also on the matter of freedom of the press, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has recently come under fire for imposing pressure on journalists. Apparently, the PA is demanding that all journalists who work for Arab satellite TV stations refer to Palestinians who are killed by the IDF as 'shaheeds' (martyrs) and refrain from voicing any criticism of the PA in their

reporting. Yusef al-Qazzaz, a senior official with the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, lashed out at Palestinian journalists for not placing the interests of their people above everything else, and dubbed some of them "primitive."

Qazzaz said he cannot understand how some Palestinian journalists make harmful remarks to their people at a time when even foreign journalists are careful not to alienate the PA. He was referring most specifically to Saudi-based newspaper, Al-Arabiya. In early January, Al-Arabiya's correspondent in the Gaza Strip, Seif al-Din Shahin, was attacked and wounded as he was driving his car in the center of Gaza City. He said the attackers identified themselves as members of Fatah.

Shahin said five gunmen fired warning shots into the air, intercepted his car, dragged him out, and beat him with the butts of their rifles. The attackers told him they were unhappy with his coverage of the paramilitary celebrations in the Gaza Strip marking the 39th anniversary of the founding of Fatah. He said that it was not the first time he had been targeted for his reporting.

Reporters Without Borders condemned the Gaza attack, reinforcing comments from its annual Press Freedom survey, which states that "the press freedom situation in the region is not encouraging." Most unusually, this event sparked a demonstration in support of freedom of the press within the PA controlled areas. Let's hope that this marks a new awakening of the freedom of reporting in the Middle East.

As a timely postscript, we note a complaint from Walid Al-Saggaf, Editor-in-chief of the Yemen Times. He has claimed that restrictive new laws are currently scheduled for discussion and a subsequent vote in Parliament.

## **Women's rights**

**A new generation of suppression in Saudi Arabia.** There was an interesting survey out of Saudi Arabia this past month, which was reported in the Gulf News, January 15, 2004. The survey, which was based on classes from 10, male-only high schools demonstrate clearly that Saudi society is suffering from a fear of the outside world and its effects. Teen attitudes do not mirror the sweeping reforms sought by the Kingdom.

Based on the findings of the survey, there does not appear to have been any social progress in the past 20 years. For example, the answers reflect an obsession with women and their roles in society. One student stated that he thought there should be a prison for women who do not follow society's customs, such as covering their faces. Another student suggested that women's morals should be carefully checked.

The results of the survey suggest that there has been no progress in Saudi Arabia. Women are seen as objects to be controlled at all times.

Then, just this past week, the *Saudi Arab News* reported that Sheik Ayed Al-Qarni, a well-known Islamic scholar, publicly stated that it was not permissible for women to drive cars in Saudi Arabia. In fact, he said, he would not let his own daughters or sisters to drive, and then he gave a number of reasons for his point of view, including the following: "I do not see women driving cars in our country because of the consequences that would spring from it such as the spread of corruption, women uncovering their hair and faces, mingling between the sexes, men being alone with women and the destruction of the family and society in whole."

**Female Suicide Bombers.** On January 19, Associated Press reported that Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin had announced a "new beginning" for Palestinian women. He was referring to a change in tactics being used by Islamic terrorist groups, who will increasingly dispatch female suicide bombers. Yassin's announcement came just days after Hamas sent out its first female bomber, Reem Raiyshi, who left behind her two young children and blew herself up at the

Erez checkpoint between Gaza and Israel. She killed three Israeli soldiers and a private security guard.

Later the same week, Reuters, UK reported that "a suicide bombing by a Palestinian mother of two in Gaza last week has brought to the surface criticism within Palestinian society of what one commentator describes as a culture of death. This suggests that the decision to send a mother to die seems to have crossed a new line. However, surveys have shown that most Palestinians support suicide attacks -- 61.8 percent according to a poll last October by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre.

However the theory that is now being put forward is that poverty and despair alone do not create terrorists. Nationally syndicated columnist Mona Charen recently commented that there is a new breed of female terrorists being created. In her article, Lady Killers (Jan. 23) she reports that Westerners cannot underestimate the power of ideas. In fact, more and more, the Arab and Muslim worlds encourage and even cater to the new female "martyrs": "In Pakistan, mothers of 'martyrs' are popular speakers. In Chechnya, a women's group called Black Widows is responsible for more than 165 murders by suicide. In March, an Arabic newspaper in London reported that Al Qaeda is setting up training camps just for women jihadis."

This trend toward female suicide bombers is also reaching outside the Middle East. On December 10, 2003, a female bomber in Moscow killed six and the New York Times has recently reported that a terror attack perpetrated by a female terrorist is highly likely.

On October 4, 2003, a female Islamic Jihad bomber killed herself and 22 others at Maxim's restaurant in Haifa. This attack is considered by many to be the most successful bombing carried out by a woman.

It seems that the various Palestinian factions are becoming increasingly adept at forcing women into service for the cause. They seek out women who have already damaged their reputations either by choice or by force. With their family honour now compromised, they are either subject to family honour killings or redemption-by-martyrdom. For more on this subject you can refer to the Prism Group website, [www.theprismgroup.org](http://www.theprismgroup.org).

## **International Funds**

Without too much fanfare, OLAF, the self-regulatory body of the European Union is about to visit the Middle East. It is no secret that only about 10% of EU expenditure can be fully and openly accounted for. This unsatisfactory situation is revealed further when overseas aid is considered.

Since its inauguration, The Prism Group has argued consistently that foreign aid directed towards Palestinians has ended up in the pockets of men of violence rather than the man in the street. <http://www.theprismgroup.org/euinqury.htm>.

Some estimates have calculated that in the past decade alone around \$10 billion has been transferred to the PA by overseas donors, which have included the governments of Canada, the United States, Norway and Ireland, as well members of the Arab League. The largest single donor is probably the European Union, which by its own accounting has contributed over 4 billion EUR, either directly to the PA or through UNRWA or NGOs. Both of the latter groupings are known to be closely aligned to the PA.

In December 2003, the EU agreed at a meeting in Rome to transfer a further 40 million EUR in special aid. This can be added to the extra recent donations from the World Bank. And the British Parliament is also considering transferring funds along the model established by their European counterparts during 2004.

The Prism Group continues to ask, "where has the money gone?" We have been in correspondence with leading MEPs on the issue. One leading backbench MEP, who is involved with the ongoing reviews of transfers to the PA, wrote to us that certain large tranches of funds paid to the PA were not authorized by the European Parliament, and that "the system has a black hole in my opinion." The sums involved are huge on any scale. They have been delivered to a comparatively small and dense populace. The PA is building neither hospitals nor schools. So what is happening to all this public taxpayers money in the hands of the Palestinian leadership?

We hope that the work of the OLAF delegation to the Middle East will finally begin to provide some transparent answers to these questions.

### **The Prism Group Website:**

Please visit our site and help direct others to the existing fact sheets. If you have ideas for fact sheets that you believe we should investigate and compile, please write to us at: [info@theprismgroup.org](mailto:info@theprismgroup.org).

Our web site is [www.theprismgroup.org](http://www.theprismgroup.org).

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