

Sayigh, May. Interviewed 2011. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

Our struggle in the international arena didn't distract us from more important work on the internal level, but it was vital on the political level to engage in the international arena and emphasise your cause and your national rights. Also, we had to carry basic responsibilities towards our people and women, which was especially the case after the Tal al-Za'tar massacre. The events began in 1975, and by the time the battle had finished, after a siege of 40 days, [in August 1976], so many were killed, and some who survived it were then killed at the checkpoints. There was such a large number of children who had lost their mothers and fathers – I remember how we stood on the street, waiting for the trucks that were bringing those forced out from Tal al-Za'tar: the wounded, the martyrs, and the children; there could not have been an uglier sight.

Finally the truck transporting the children arrived, the truck filled with those who had no one left. Someone from the Red Cross was standing next to me and he asked, "What should we do with these children?". I replied, "These are *our* children; they are for us to care for." A journalist then reported that the the Women's Union had assumed responsibility for the children of Tal al-Za'tar. So I went to meet Abu Ammar along with my friend, sister Najla Nseir, who was a member of the general secretariat of the Women's Union. My eyes filled with tears as I told him, "These are our children, and we shall take them". He replied, "Done." It was remarkable – he was a very caring person, and despite everything, he possessed an incredible capacity for compassion.

The dilemma was where to take them at that moment. We first housed them at the Islamic orphanage. Then we acquired a house that was up for sale: a large villa with a garden, which we bought and improved. We then brought in and trained a group of girls who were also from Tal al-Za'tar – they were very young, and we trained them to become replacement mothers. For example, after the parents were killed, you would have three or four children left without a mother or father. So we put each family of siblings into one room with their replacement mother. After a while the children felt that life was slowly returning.

Those children have now grown old! We adopted them properly – each house was a home. We made them feel they were at home and not in an orphanage.

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Full care was given, and oversight also provided by various UN organisations. Everyone helped to supervise it. We also benefited from the various organisations around us. Even now, the adoption is proper: we would hand over kids who had a relative, an aunt for example, and willing to adopt them. We kept those with no one at the Bayt Atfal al-Sumoud (the Children of Steadfastness House). Of course, the house expanded and grew – after the 1978 invasion of Lebanon, the number of martyrs and orphans grew constantly, and we would assume responsibility for them, and build and expanded the house. We were about to establish a training school for those who had not done well at school, or who we were unable to attend university, to have a chance to learn a trade and support themselves. But when the 1982 invasion began, we became worried, and moved the children to a school in Souq al-Gharb. The old Women’s Union, established by the first generation of women who came from Palestine in 1948, had a house in the mountain in the village of Souq al-Gharb, and the children stayed there for a while. When the invasion reached them we were forced to send them to Syria. The move to Syria was a tragedy; I mean, the children were psychologically destroyed because it took place under constant bombardment and slaughter. It took three days to reach the Syrian border, and we then placed them in the Martyrs School in Damascus. Some of them grew up and ventured out into the world; others went to Tunis with Abu Ammar.