

**Al-Abadi, Mamdouh. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>**

There are causes in one's life that are always on one's mind. There are different aspects to it; whether childhood, studies, or a career. Or perhaps an athletic feat or political action. Therefore, I would like to talk about this important aspect of my life. An essential and human experience in my life. It so happens that in 1987 I was nominated Head of the Medical Association, a very powerful union in Jordan. Trade unions in Jordan, such as the Lawyers' Union, Engineers Association, and the Medical Association, were very strong unions.

We did not have a parliament or authorised political parties in Jordan at the time, so trade unions became the fortress of democracy in Jordan. The political scene in Jordan revolved around a building in Amman's Shmeisiani district. The political atmosphere within the unions was excellent – all the different political factions, whether to the left or the right, or even in between, and the different Palestinian organizations in Jordan. This combination, which was officially banned, existed in Jordan.

I won the election and entered the union, which contained members of various political parties. I was an independent but there were Muslim Brotherhood elements, Fatah members, communists and Baathists. The mix of this multi-party council made up of different political parties was the strongest player on the Jordanian scene. A few months later, the first Palestinian Intifada took place.

The First Intifada or the so-called "Intifada of stones", was a peaceful uprising that didn't use weapons. Instead it used civil disobedience and stones as its weapon. This gave hope to many Jordanians regardless of their roots, whether they were originally Palestinian or Jordanian. All the people supported this blessed intifada. Our role as trade unions was a leadership role. The lawyers' union, doctors' union and engineers' union, pharmacists, dentists were all invited to a general meeting for all political, financial, economical entities in Jordan. They were invited to form a committee to raise funds for Palestine. There were over ninety people in attendance and ten managers who organised the committee. We called it 'The Jordanian Popular Committee for the Support of the Intifada'.

We were very successful in taking the first step towards forming the committee. The Jordanian government approved our request to classify donations to the committee as tax-exempt. If a citizen owed the government 100 dinars in taxes, he would be allowed to pay only fifty dinars to the

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government and donate fifty dinars to the committee. The same applied to banks and large corporations.

Once we saw the number of casualties among the victims, we wanted to offer more assistance. We decided to donate 1000 dinars to every martyr's family, and to give the wounded 200 dinars each. However, we asked that the family bring proof of 'next of kin' as you would say in English, a letter or something similar from Gaza or the West Bank saying the person collecting the money was authorised to do so.

We agreed that the headquarters of this committee would be the doctor's union in Jordan. I was the Chief physician at the time and I oversaw the management of the committee. We began collecting donations and holding lectures and seminars, festivals, anything we could do to support the Intifada in any way. On one occasion, we sent a thousand young Jordanians into the streets of Amman carrying collection boxes with the committee's name on them. Those collection boxes don't bring in large amounts of money, but we wanted to encourage the Jordanian people to support the committee. We must have collected more than twenty million dinars, which was about thirty million dollars at the time.

The money was spent very quickly. I was the secretary of the committee. I was elected over many older, more experienced national figures, you will excuse me from mentioning their names, I was the youngest and most active member of the committee. I was very busy but I was grateful. The committee met every week at the Arab Bank and many Palestinians came to the union carrying reports and certificates. The women who came to the meetings were the mothers and the sisters of the dead and wounded. Meeting them was an honour but seeing them filled us with sadness. They told us it was not necessary to feel sad for them because they knew that the death of their loved ones was not in vain. They were very patriotic, brave, and very invested in the struggle. This gave us the morale to keep collecting donations. We also donated money to the Palestinian Red Crescent, the Red Crescent in Gaza, and many more Palestinian institutions that needed help.

I remember a unique story; Mr Hosni al-Ashab, the education manager in Jerusalem came to see me with Bahgat Abu Ghariba, a Palestinian living in Amman. They both came to my office and at the time I was the deputy of Amman while I was working at the Committee. They told me that the teachers in Jerusalem had been on strike for months because they hadn't been paid. At first, the teachers had been paid by the Royal Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; then the PLO started paying them. However, their funding was in jeopardy because of the Gulf war. As a result, they were unable to pay the teachers. I felt it was essential for the children to go to school. If they couldn't go then, their parents would leave Jerusalem and the city would be deserted. I personally would never let my child go without an education, so we gave them a cheque for half a million Jordanian dinars. Thankfully the teachers were paid and the schools opened again. Even the smallest contribution to the

Palestinian cause, any action, no matter how small, helps to build a strong support base for the Palestinian people to lean on. Obviously the teachers had the right to demand pay; they need to make a living, their children need to eat. They would have left Jerusalem otherwise. It is very important work.

My experience in the Jordanian Popular Committee for the Support of the Intifada is one I cherish and am proud of, because I helped the Palestinians.

I believe that there is a real lack of action and support whether in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and in Lebanon or nearby countries. To this day there is a real lack of support for the people in Palestine, in Gaza and in the West Bank or in the occupied territories.

Support is essential to keep people living in their homes and on their lands. They struggle and sacrifice; just praying for them without taking action does not help. Civil society institutions and all the various political parties in the Arab world should contribute to the survival of these oppressed people. Their country is occupied, they are oppressed, there is destruction, expulsion, their homes are demolished and their children are killed. They need help and support. I believe that the Jordanian Popular Committee for the Support of the Intifada, which lasted for many years, was an excellent example. The Jordanian people still look back on it with reverence and respect as a role model of how society can support causes and oppressed peoples in the world.