

Opinion/Editorial

Rebuilding a General Union of Palestinian Students

Raja Abdulhaq, *The Electronic Intifada*, 1 December 2008

From the very beginning, students have played an active role in the Palestinian national movement. Their enthusiasm, motivation, and hard work help them to overcome even the most daunting tasks. Organizing rallies, academic events, political debates, fundraising, cultural programs, students demonstrate the great influence they are able to assert on societies divided by war, engrossed by political strife, and weakened by economic turmoil.

The General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) has been driven by the goal of organizing and uniting student activists devoted to helping achieve justice and freedom for the Palestinian people. GUPS is a student founded organization dedicated to presenting agenda that informs and educates people about Palestine, Arabs, and the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Historically, GUPS has always played a significant role in the Palestinian cause. Officially launched in 1959 in Cairo, Egypt, there were more than 100 GUPS branches worldwide, and more than 100,000 students were involved. GUPS was active in coordinating with other student groups and raising awareness about the Palestinian. However, it collapsed after the Oslo Accords in the mid-1990s.

I came to the US in late 2004, and was not politically active until I attended the Popular Conference for Palestinians in the US. There I met Palestinians who shared my feelings and aspirations. What fascinated me the most were the students from San Francisco, who rebuilt a GUPS chapter there. That was a strong motivation for me to work on rebuilding GUPS in New York, and work with them, and with the Popular Conference for Palestinians in the US to reform a national body for students. Despite the obstacles we have been facing, we have already succeeded in establishing chapters in New York and at California State University, Chico. We are still working on rebuilding local chapters and forming a national body.

It's important to understand and consider the urgency of having an umbrella organization for Palestinian students in the US. The combination of Israel's ongoing siege of Gaza and the factional split dividing Palestinians, Palestinian students need an organization that will not only support their academic and political goals, but enhance cooperation and coordination across the US. GUPS was once a major force within the Palestinian

national movement, and it can be again. By reforming GUPS, Palestinian students can retrieve their history to have a better future.

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