

What have Palestinian public schools teachers obtained after a strike that lasted over two months?

Thousands of teachers working in public schools in the West Bank were on strike for more than two months over several protracted issues that triggered their labor dispute with the Palestinian government, including their right to organize in a democratic manner and choose their representatives. Thus, they demanded the establishment of a democratic & independent trade union to represent them, the adoption of a law to professionalize education, the disbursement of a 15% salary raise as stipulated by a prior agreement reached between teachers and the government, and the payment of their full salaries, since only 80% of teachers' salaries (as is the case for all governmental employees) have been paid for more than a year due to the financial crisis faced by the Palestinian Authority.

One of the key issues that the movement sought to address is the **lack of real representation for teachers working in governmental schools**. The General Federation of Teachers, which claims to represent governmental teachers, is affiliated with the PLO. Teachers on strike believe that this federation does not represent them, due to the many restrictions on membership and candidates for elections, and the fact that selection of representatives relies on political affiliation, not democracy.

Due to the fact that the government had failed to respect prior collective agreements (following the 2016 and the 2022 strikes), teachers refused to stop their strike unless all their demands are met, and they obtain proper guarantees that the government will actually fulfill its obligations.

The government attempted to halt the strike movement by using various administrative and financial means, such as administrative penalties, including filing a case in the Administrative Court, arbitrary transfer of some teachers, and the referral of some senior teachers to retirement, despite a decision by the Prime Minister to extend their service until the end of the year. Financial penalties include deductions from the salaries of striking teachers. Some teachers on strike also reported having been threatened of arrest.

However, in view of the teacher's resolve not to give in, the Fatah movement announced an initiative to solve the crisis, pledging that elections for the teachers' union would be held at the beginning of the next school year, in September 2023, and wage issues would be solved. The initiative also included the cancellation of the administrative, legal, and financial procedures that the government took against teachers on strike. However, there was no notable progress concerning commitments towards paying full salaries and agreed-upon salary raise, as only a 5% raise was to be paid while 10% would be considered as a debt to teachers from the government and paid at an ulterior date.

How did teachers respond to the government's initiative?

The teachers' movement finally decided to suspend their strike and resume work after Eid Al-Fitr. They gave the government until the 10th of September, 2023, to implement its initiative, and warned that any deductions or penalties during this period would affect the start of the next school year, regardless of whether or not the initiative is implemented. After delaying the matter a couple of days, the government finally announced it would pay the amounts deducted from teachers.

Additional Labor Disputes

The Workers' Union of the Association of Churches' Federation in Gaza organized several protests during March 2023, as the association's board of directors did not respond to the rights-based demands of workers, including demands concerning rights guaranteed by relevant laws. Workers have mobilized to obtain the application of the minimum wage, a fair salary scale, job security, and the provision of insurances & allowances.



Political division between West Bank and Gaza might soon also affect the minimum wage amount

On 15/03/2023, the de-facto authority in Gaza decided to form a wage committee to study the application of a minimum wage in Gaza, the situation of wages and related policies. As stated by the Labor Ministry in Gaza, the committee will take into consideration the living conditions and standard, the poverty line and the level of expenditures in Gaza, when setting an amount for the minimum wage. This step would widen the gap between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank when it comes to the legal framework, noting that in the West Bank a national minimum wage of 1,880 NIS is in force since 1/01/2022. In Gaza, the new minimum wage might be much lower, as the authorities intend to take into consideration the general economic situation of the Gazans and the Gaza Strip, which may lead to no improvement at all in the situation of workers. In 2022, 88% of Gazan workers in the private sector earned less than half of the minimum wage on average.

DWRC's IWD event aimed at highlighting women's opportunities & challenges in obtaining job opportunities without discrimination, especially WWDs



DWRC implemented an event on the occasion of Women's International Day in Gaza. The event was attended by 185 representatives of the National Coalition "My Right", institutions, cooperatives, trade unions and the Ministry of Labor in Gaza. The event included discussion sessions, decision makers, interactions from duty bearers on women's messages, including messages from women with disabilities, presentation of stories from women with disabilities, artistic performances developed by women with disabilities, and the launching of women's exhibition for women's products for institutions affiliated with the National Coalition: "My Right", and products created by women with disabilities.

DWRC continues to contribute in building the capacities of workers and unionists in different topics

• **A training addressing collective bargaining and labor agreements**



Aiming to build the capacities of unionists to enhance the right to organize and improve the representative and bargaining power of unionists, DWRC trained twenty unionists, including 12 women, from various trade unions. During this training that was held in Ramallah between 02-04/03/2023, participants were able to improve their knowledge and skills regarding bargaining, trade unions' role, collective labor agreements.

• **Equality and non-discrimination at work training**: twelve unionists and journalists participated in a three-day training course about equality and non-discrimination at work in Ramallah on 09/03/2023. The training focused on gender equality, equal opportunities, discrimination and promotion at work, access to decision making positions, and equality in wages. Participants also discussed ways and mechanisms to overcome discrimination.

• **ILO Convention no. 190 & elimination of gender-based violence training**



In Gaza, a training course about ILO C190 & GBV took place with the participation of 26 union representatives. During the training, participants learned about assessing risks of violence at work, and mechanisms of protection from violence and harassment at work.