

Press Release 12th March 2007

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WOMAN MAYOR OF RAMALLAH WELCOMED BY OXFORD TOWN AND GOWN

Fifteen months ago, Janet Michael won her place as the first woman mayor of a West Bank city, in Palestinian municipal elections that were agreed as free and fair by EU monitors. She is an independent, and a Christian, who won support from Hamas councillors. She said: 'I am not a politician. They are normal people, and we all want to run the city the best way we can for the benefit of the people.'

Janet Michael was given a warm reception by town and gown when she visited Oxford on 8-10th March at the invitation of the grassroots Oxford-Ramallah Friendship Association. Oxford Town Hall hosted her three times: a reception by the Deputy Mayor, Mary Clarkson; a public meeting as part of International Women's' Festival; and a tête-à-tête with the Lord Mayor, Jim Campbell. At St Antony's College, Oxford University, Dr Eugene Rogan, head of the Middle East Centre, supported her call for an end to the Israeli occupation – 'our main problem' as she put it – so that people in Ramallah and the whole of Palestine would be able to live a normal life. She spoke at Oxfam, and to BBC Oxford TV and radio.

Janet Michael told of Palestinian women coping with traumatised children. Their lives have been made worse in the past year by the economic blockade imposed by the US, Israel and the EU since Hamas was elected to run the Palestinian Authority – a whole people punished for electing the wrong lot. And she described how the Wall, built by Israel, is separating people in Ramallah from their land. They cannot even build a sewage plant on the outskirts of the city as the Israelis, who control the area, will not give permission.

Ms Michael was in the UK for a week, also visiting Birmingham, which has its own twinning initiative, and London for solidarity events, where she met with Prof. Hassassian, Palestinian Delegate to the UK.

The visit to Oxford highlighted the benefits of people here learning at first hand about life under occupation. Fundraising is beginning for a children's visit this summer, to bring over eight kids from one of the refugee camps in Ramallah. To find out more, or donate towards bringing

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the children over, see: www.oxford-ramallah.org.

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