

## Nour Odeh

Nour Odeh is a media professional and communications consultant, CEO and founder of Connect Consulting, Palestine's first strategic communications consultancy firm. Before that, she was the director of the Palestinian Media Centre and spokesperson of the Palestinian government – the first and, so far, only woman to assume this position.

Prior to her public service, Nour was a career journalist who covered the Palestine story extensively for over 11 years in English, Arabic, and Spanish, languages that she speaks fluently. She helped set up and lead Ramattan News Agency in Gaza. Nour was also the first Al Jazeera English correspondent in Gaza when the channel launched in 2006. In 2008, Nour's reporting was recognized at the Monte Carlo Television Festival and won Al Jazeera Network's first Golden Nymph award.

Nour's life experiences have informed her career and life choices. "I am a diaspora kid who was born in Syria. My parents' work for Palestine took me to all four corners of the earth, exposing me to a variety of cultures and narratives," Nour explains. Though her career has spanned the spectrum of media and communications, and she has assumed official positions in addition to working in the media in various capacities, Nour identifies herself first and foremost as a communicator.

Here is more about Nour, the person, in her own words.

I am the proud mother of two children: Yasser (born in 2005) and Yousef (born in 2015). Both of my sons are independent and beautiful persons whom I've raised to stand their ground and fight for what they believe in. For Yousef, this quality shines when he asserts his presence and space in the family and fights to get his way (he usually wins). I can see him becoming an unstoppable force when he grows up. Yasser is a gentle yet strong soul who is creative, progressive, and independent. He has the strength

and confidence to express and defend his opinions and to stand up for what he believes in. Recently, he lectured a taxi driver who was belittling "women these days" who complain about housework. Yasser did not hold back and told the man how being a housewife is a job and that he should be grateful to his wife for putting up with all the work to keep him clean and well fed. He also went on to tell him that women should work because their contributions add to society and because they are "tireless." I was glowing with pride.

I am married to the love of my life and my best friend, Ammar Hijazi, a consummate diplomat who now serves as the Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs at the Foreign Ministry and I am his biggest fan without a doubt. Ammar and I have different careers and we are both public figures in our own right. I have chosen social activism in addition to a lifetime career of commitment to advancing the Palestinian narrative. So when my writing on internal issues is controversial and critical, which it usually is, my husband reminds everyone of the most important foundation of our beautiful relationship as partners, independence of thought and freedom.

Of all the hobbies and activities that I've pursued (*dabka*, writing, singing, and painting), I have to say that writing and *dabka* remain important sources of soul-searching and vitality in my life. I performed *dabka* in my high school years on stages big and small. It was an important experience in my life because at the time (early 1990s), it was my way of telling audiences in Nicaragua and the Philippines (where I lived) that Palestine not only exists but that it boasts a culture deeply rooted in joy, creativity, and beauty. I don't perform anymore but I make sure to dance *dabka* any chance I get.

Writing is my soul food. After leaving government, I found that advocating for reform and change through writing brought me peace and strength. It also allowed me to reconnect with the writer in me and through that with my late maternal grandfather, the poet and educator Husni Fariz, who taught me that independent and forward thinking is priceless. He taught me that language is a tool to share one's soul and to reach out and touch the souls of others. I try to honor these lessons every time I write one of my op-eds.

Last but not least, my nuclear family remains the shining light and center of gravity in my life. I am the proud older sister of Omar and Jawad, two creative and beautiful persons. My parents are the source of my strength to fight the battles I believe are worthy and of the confidence to pursue my dreams. Kifah Odeh, my dad, is Palestine's ambassador to Spain, and Hala Fariz, my mom, is Palestine's ambassador to Sweden. They too had independent careers that in the end made them inspirational diplomats and advocates for Palestine. I like to think that my best qualities mirror theirs.

