

From Student to Doctor

A Young Graduate's Story of Leadership in Gaza

Courtesy of Taawon (Welfare Association)



Suhair M., a medical graduate, walks into a temporary clinic set up inside a displacement camp in Gaza.



On International Women's Day, the offices of UN Human Rights, UN Women, and the United Nations Population Fund in Palestine launch the "We Survive, We Lead" campaign to amplify the lived experiences of Palestinian women. In partnership with Taawon (Welfare Association), we present stories of suffering, resilience and leadership as a testimony and a clear call to action to uphold and protect dignity and human rights.

In Gaza, leadership is not always visible from a stage or behind a microphone. Sometimes it is found in a hospital corridor under bombardment, in a young woman refusing to abandon her patients, her profession, or her future.

Dr. Suhair graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Azhar University in 2024. By September of that year, she had begun her professional training at the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza. Medicine had been her dream for years. "A person should not spend their whole life in vain," she says. "This was the message I wanted my life to carry." Within weeks of starting her training, the war erupted. Hospitals were besieged. Programs were suspended. Entire neighborhoods were empty. Suhair and her family were displaced multiple times, moving from north to south and back to central Gaza. When they returned home, they found it largely destroyed. Yet she did not stop.

While many colleagues were forced to leave, Suhair moved between Al-Aqsa Hospital, Al-Awda Hospital, and field facilities in the central region. Transportation was scarce; sometimes she walked long distances just to reach the first available bus. There was no protection from rain or shelling. Hunger made concentration almost impossible during long shifts. "We saw severe blood loss. We saw malnutrition," she recalls. "There were moments when we had no treatment available and had to search for alternatives." When communications were cut, and ambulances could not reach them, staff members ran under bombardment to nearby hospitals to call for help. Leadership, in these moments, was not a title. It was a decision. The decision to show up.

As a young woman doctor, she also carried her family's fear. "At the beginning, my parents didn't want me to go out. They were afraid for me," she says. They called constantly to make sure she was safe. But gradually, they came to understand that her presence in the hospital was not just work; it was a responsibility.

The war changed her understanding of medicine. "It made me realize how important our role is in society, how much people need us," she says. In a matter of months, she gained experience that might otherwise have taken years. "The war taught me how to be strong."

Yet even as she served on the frontlines, another barrier threatened her future. Like that of many graduates in Gaza, Suhair's university certificate was withheld due to accumulated tuition fees during the war. Without the official release of her degree, she could not formally continue her specialization or advance her career.

Through an ISNAD scholarship, Taawon's initiative to protect higher education in Gaza had her outstanding tuition covered, and her certificate was issued. The support did more than settle a debt; it restored her academic standing and secured her professional path. "The obstacle was removed," she says simply. "Now I can continue."

For her, survival is not passive endurance. It is action. It is walking to work when transport is unavailable. It is treating patients despite hunger. It is insisting on education when systems collapse. It is refusing to let war define the limits of possibility. "The biggest lesson I learned," she says, "is that I will not give up. No matter how hard life is, we continue."

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