Ladies & Gentlemen; Good morning; I am so delighted to stand here at this platform in a university that is so dear to me “Birzeit University” and it is a pleasure to have the AIWF in Palestine for the first time, thank you Mrs. Al Kaylani and PWC “Price water house coopers” for arranging this conference in Palestine and a big thank you for all who participated in making this event take place

Let’s start with the definition of Glass Ceiling and see if this phenomena exist in Palestine?!

The Glass Ceiling is : an invisible barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements; hindering their advancement, women can see elite positions but cannot reach them.

This barrier can make many women feel as if they are not worthy enough to have these high-ranking positions, but also they feel as if their bosses do not take them seriously or see them as potential candidates.

Do we have the phenomena of glass ceiling in Palestine? Or do we have other barriers that Prevent women from taking chances in LIFE?

If the answer is; YES! And the barriers exist!! How can women go beyond barriers? And transform barriers into opportunities

Palestinian Women are like other women around the world, they dream of having a secure, stable and happy life. Their needs are the same; looking for opportunities to improve the quality of their lives by having their chances to learn and grow ….

They are living under occupation; fighting and struggling for their rights; to have good quality of education and descent work … They believe that life is God’s precious gift that must be valued and well invested ….

Referring to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2012: regarding some of the facts and figures related to women in Palestine; the following will be discovered:

- Women form 49.2% of the Palestinian population (4.35M)
- Female participation in higher education was 58 % (2010/2011)
• Females graduated from universities were 59.7% (2009/2010)

• Female participation in labor force was only 16%.

• We have five Ambassadors which form (5.4%), five ministers which form 23% (22/5), we have 17 members at the Palestinian Legislative council (132/17) which form 12.9%, we have twenty Judges and one Governor (in Ramallah District / 2009)

• Only 5.4% of total enterprises in Palestine are owned by women (BWF; 2009)

**Obviously; we do have problems!! Thoughts and questions that might come to mind from the mentioned figures above; are:**

• Almost a third of the population’s contribution in economy is absent!!

• What is the explanation for the *contradiction* between the percentage of educated women and the percentage of women joining the workforce!!

• The clear fact is that the problem is in the *grassroots* positions!! And is not limited to the high ranked positions only; and this *makes us wonder*;

  **What are the real causes hindering Women from taking their chances in LIFE? What are the barriers that prevent women’s direct contribution in economy?**

1. Is it Occupation?

2. Or is it culture? Or religion?

3. Or maybe it is related to **WOMEN** themselves??!

Palestinians under **Occupation** are living a critical; insecure; unstable life in unpredicted environment; all concrete barriers -visible and invisible- are around: check points, roadblocks; closures and restrictions on movement between their own towns & cities and the outside world.... Lack of **opportunities**; high percentages of unemployment and lack of **sovereignty**... etc

This environment is creating special characteristics and beliefs in Palestinians **MINDS & HEARTS.**. Palestinians are going beyond the barriers in their daily life; if roads are closed they will search for another and if they can’t find any; they will create new one … they go to work, they go to schools and move forward with their dreams, fighting for the decent life they desire … The hardships and unstable life taught Palestinians the real meaning of **Conviction; persistence & responsibility**, they never lose faith... They never give up; on the contrary they stick to the fight when they are hardest hit!
They learned flexibility & always to prepare contingency plans “plan B; C; D …” They learned that education is a key for the quality of life. and In spite of everything; they learned to always look for the positive side of life and always be READY for tomorrow and for new start up’s …

**With all this potential; imagine Palestine without occupation!! If all these efforts are concentrated on constructive work and ambitions realization!!**

**So what about Culture?!** Is it another barrier? Or specifically speaking; is it MEN; are they hindering women Ambitions!! Preventing them from moving forward to their DREAMS realization …? Or is it family demands?

Men domination is all over the world; this phenomenon is not exclusive to a certain religion or certain nationality…. And Lots of success stories around; about women who were able to create a balance between their families’ duties and their businesses!!

Then; is it **Religion**?!

Religion is supporting and protecting women; the Quran is full of rules and instructions that assure women rights in education and in financial independence; **first business lady in Islam** was Prophet Mohamed’s Wife Khadija, she was known as wise, strong and powerful international trader. The position of women in Islam according to the Qur'an and Hadiths; differs vastly from Islam in practice.

**In-appropriate Practices** that conflict with our beliefs; must be **changed** and only suitable, rational habits and practices must be maintained and followed.

**Is it possible that WOMEN Themselves** are the reason behind their lack of economic contributions?!

Women must be AWARE of the importance of their contributions; their roles as key players in the economy as they form half of the society, they need to understand that their lives and the life of their children will not be improved without serious efforts from all the population! Our country is in need for all potentials of men & women, which lead us to the following questions:

1. How can Women go beyond barriers?
2. How they can break the glass ceiling and be part of the change they want to SEE?! How to transform barriers in to **OPPORTUNITIES**?!

From my own experience as a Palestinian business woman who works in construction in Palestine and who was raised in Hebron city in a family that gave equal chances for boys and girls and as a firm believer in religion and in the Palestinian cause; I found out that every person is responsible for his life and destiny; its all about choices and decision making; you decide what you want in life and as said: “it’s a funny thing about life if you refuse everything but the best; you very often get it”, I do believe
that if everyone do his share as good as he can then our efforts will be counted and heard by all the world regardless of gender, religion or even nationality; your knowledge; your passion and persistence will be counted and heard, so lets do our best. .... But **there are keys to success that must be obtained to enable women; young entrepreneurs and young leaders to reach the desired destination:** these keys are:

- **Believe** in yourself, have confidence....
- **Invest in yourself by education,** it is the KEY that no one can take away from you
- **Be committed** with your values, beliefs and dare to dream and dare to be a visionary
- **Work hard** : no elevator to success; all what you need is a strong foundation beneath your feet that could be built by using the formula of commitment; hard work and persistence
- **Positive thinking and HOPES** are your weapons against all barriers … there is always light at the End of the tunnel but you have to be patient ….
- Remember that the Best is yet to come!! And tomorrow is better than today!!
- **Learn to be productive** and spread the awareness between people, independency could be achieved if we focus on productivity, our unity will foster our efforts and boost harmony and balance …
- **Recognize your strengths and work hard** on your weaknesses
- **Be ready for the opportunities** and catch before wasted
- **Easy to find opportunities** but keeping it is the challenge ….
- **Never listen to people** who say you can’t …

**Make sure to raise your children to believe in the above values; it is in your hands**

**Palestine is a potential market;** it is in need for everything; manufacturing, services, agriculture ….

If you have an idea; work on it and start today not tomorrow .... Remember Palestinians are entrepreneurs in SPIRIT!! If there are no opportunities; let’s create them; start ups may be difficult but nothing is impossible … if someone can make it then you can ….

Never let occupation hinder your way … Injustice will come to an END … rest when you must but don’t quit!! .......
Conviction, Persistence & Hard work are the **WAY** ....

Thank you & All the best