



Filled with Hope

By Nesma Al-Ghola

Facilitated and Translated by
Diakonia/NAD, Disability Rights Program



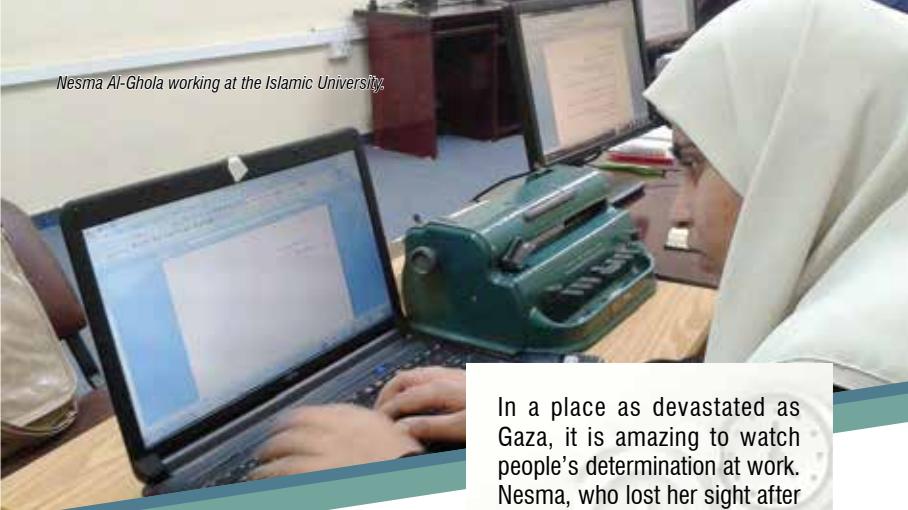
The sky is spacious, but it is still not enough for my abilities and dreams."

With these words, Nesma started her speech and added: "I managed to overcome the years which permeated sorrow. Today I am presenting myself as always filled with hope and dreaming of a better future."

My name is Nesma Al-Ghola, coming from a Gazan family that consists of 11 members. I lost my sight when I was six years old as a result of meningitis fever. At that time, doctors didn't manage to diagnose the reason of this fever and as a result, I became blind. Compared to my brother, a first-born son who enjoys opportunities without discrimination because he is "normal" (as people refer to him), I must make my way in a male-dominated society that makes it impossible for me as a girl with visual impairment.

Despite my disability, I have managed to live my life and get a job at the Islamic University. I am now working as a coordinator at the Assistive Technology Center in the disability department. I am supervising the activities related to disabled students and I assist those who are in need for support. Moreover, I work in the field of training. I participated in a training-of-trainers course, and although I am competent to train others in the field of advocacy and disability, unfortunately, many organizations do not believe in our abilities as disabled people to be able to perform this task.

Every morning when I wake up, I feel that my happiness is incomplete because I face a new day with new challenges, whether at the university, or at home, or even in the streets—especially being



Nesma Al-Ghola working at the Islamic University.

surrounded by people who think negatively of people with disabilities. I usually wake up early in the morning to prepare myself for work. I prepare and organize all needed documents and sometimes manage to read articles and listen to different programs on the radio. I leave home at 7:30am to get to work. I love to be punctual, and to serve as a role model to other disabled persons who are holding positions in other organizations. One of the main obstacles that I face in the morning is moving alone between the rubble and remnants resulting from the aggression last year on Gaza Strip (July-August 2014). I can say that what happened last summer can't be described. Thousands were killed and injured and many others were displaced. I am among the people whose houses were partially destroyed and who were displaced.

Being a positive person who is accepting of others, despite their attitudes towards people with disabilities, is a blessing in itself, and I am proud to be one of those individuals. For example, I take a comment from a taxi driver who doesn't want to give me a ride just because of my disability in a peaceful manner. I usually do that because I believe in that one day all will be treated on an equal basis, and that discrimination against the disabled will be eliminated with

In a place as devastated as Gaza, it is amazing to watch people's determination at work. Nesma, who lost her sight after a childhood illness, astonishes us with the story of her life that is difficult but full of potential and optimism.

the assistance of organizations who will help raise community awareness to support the rights of people with disabilities. I am known among my colleagues at work for being a hard worker and a team player who works under pressure and who loves to cooperate with others. Besides that, I am an active person in the field of advocacy for the rights and entitlements of my peers.

At the end of my workday at the university, my activities begin in the field of advocacy. I am an active member with the advocacy and support committee under the umbrella of the National Society for Rehabilitation. I always get trainings and do sport activities with the assistance of Al-Salam Sports Club for persons with disabilities. Additionally, I am an active member in two associations—one for the visually impaired, and the other for persons with disabilities leading change.



Here I am, walking with dreams in my mind. I step forward full of hope and strength to continue with my dreams and my imagination. Working with my hands and

loving with my heart, hoping for a better future which is unfolding in front of me.

Similar to many others within her age group, each day Nesma dreams about a better future for herself and others with disabilities. It is essential to accept this group into society, as they are capable people who can make a difference.

Nesma Nafed Al-Ghola, 27, is from Al-Shajayeh, Al-Sha'af neighborhood in Gaza. She holds a master's degree in Interpretation of Quran Sciences from the Islamic University, and was the first visually impaired woman to earn this degree.

Our Readers Say ...

"When I was studying to get my driving license I decided to take the car without permission. I accidentally hit it and I decided to get it fixed without anyone knowing. My dad had given me his university ring, which was a very sentimental and expensive thing to give to me and I wore it for a couple of years. I had never taken it off, but, I decided to sell it since I had to fix the car. I sold it for \$260. I am pretty sure the rings cost more than that. To this day, no one in my family knows."

Anonymous (Jerusalem)

"I was out with my friends really late one night. I live in a village, just outside the city, so transportation tends to end early. They convinced me to stay late, and I had to walk home at 4:00am. I was afraid since dogs roam around in the streets. I was almost home, so close I could see it, and I started to hear a low growl. Then I heard some soft footsteps. This is a village, so the streetlights are far apart. I sprinted to the closest one, stood under it and called my brother. I could still hear the growling and footsteps. He picked me up, and as we were driving away, we saw a wild boar walking nearby."

Karim Zagha (Nablus)