



Gabi Baramki Fund for Scientific Applied Research

By Haifa Baramki



Towards the end of his life and while still in the intensive care unit fighting lung cancer, Gabi Baramki decided, as his last contribution to Palestinian Higher Education, to establish a special fund for scientific applied research. The Fund would extend monetary awards to Palestinian graduate students, researchers, and research assistants to conduct applied research for the benefit of the Palestinian industrial and agricultural sectors. As the Palestinians strive to achieve economic independence, he strongly believed in the importance of collaboration between the universities and the industries using applied research as the vehicle to introduce innovation and continuous improvements to existing Palestinian products in order to create vibrant industrial and agricultural sectors.

Gabi dedicated his life to Palestinian education in general and to university higher education in particular. He played a major role in establishing higher education in Palestine, and his name became synonymous with the movement to establish Palestinian universities. His journey with Palestinian higher education started when he joined Birzeit College (currently Birzeit University) as a young graduate in 1953, and he continued to be involved, in one way or another, until he died on August 30, 2012. He was instrumental in establishing Birzeit University, and was a founding member of the Council for Higher Education. In addition to his tenure as the acting president of Birzeit University for 19 years (1974–1993), he became a special consultant for the first Palestinian Ministry of Education in 1994, and was concurrently the secretary general of the Council for Scientific Research and the chairman of the Quality Improvement Fund board. He was the president of the Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace and was a



member of Pugwash Conferences on Sciences and World Affairs, where he served as an elected council member for two five-year periods (1992–2002). He also served as a member of the Birzeit University board of trustees and the Edward Said Palestinian National Institute of Music.

Gabi believed that Palestinian universities, like any universities in the world, are the means to encourage critical and analytical thinking, as well as precision and perseverance, qualities necessary to produce well-rounded, educated persons. He believed that an educated Palestinian nation, produced by quality university education, would have better chances of survival under the prevailing difficult and inhumane conditions of Israeli occupation. In his book *Peaceful Resistance: Building a Palestinian University under Occupation*, he referred to this idea: “Education is at the heart of every nation that helps to equip young people with the knowledge and culture that provide an extra layer of strength

and the capability necessary to cope with a harsh unrelenting occupation. Education is a means of peaceful resistance and a tool to instill in the young Palestinians the culture of true democracy to prepare them to live in a free, peaceful and democratic society in a state of their own.”

Gary Anderson, in his book *Fundamentals of Educational Research*, describes two approaches to educational research: the basic or academic approach, and the applied-research approach. Each approach has a different purpose, which influences the nature of the respective research. The Gabi Baramki Fund falls under the second approach, focusing on research driven by university innovations and the needs of Palestinian industries. The Fund Annual Award is to be given to the research project that fulfils this aim. Gabi believed that research and its outputs could tremendously enhance Palestinian academia and industry through 1) contributing to increasing the resources available for scientific



research in Palestinian universities, 2) contributing to improving the production of the industrial and agricultural sectors through applying the outputs of applied research, and 3) enhancing the research culture in Palestine through stimulating the competitive spirit and professionalism between scientists and researchers.

Gabi spent his entire adult life in higher education and was aware that insufficient funding is the major cause behind the lack of research activities in Palestinian universities. This, in turn, is a result of the Israeli occupation's strangulation of the Palestinian economy since 1967. This situation has resulted in impoverishing the population, thus rendering them incapable of covering the cost of their sons' and daughters' education. For this reason, the universities had to prioritise and choose where to concentrate their efforts. They logically chose the instruction and teaching part of the education process.

To fulfil his last wish, his wife and family established this Fund under

the title "Gabi Baramki Fund for Research," and Gabi himself, before he passed away, willed the seed money for this Fund. He also expressed his desire that supplementary funding be sought from his former Birzeit University students who graduated during his time as acting president of the university, as well as from his family and local and international friends and benefactors who may wish to contribute to this cause. Work to institutionalise the Fund is presently under way, and the Fund's board of directors is hoping to launch its webpage in November 2014. All information pertaining to the fund, including a call for proposals and all submission criteria and conditions will be posted on the Fund webpage after the launch.

Haifa Baramki is a native of Gaza who lives in Ramallah. She currently is a board member of the World YWCA, the vice-president of the YWCA of Palestine, and a member of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.