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## Female construction worker seeks to build better future in Gaza



At the Abu Eida cement factory in the West Bank, Jamila Abu Oushiba shovels cement into bags and lift them onto a neat pile. This is usually a job reserved for men, but for Palestinian woman Jamila, it's a way to generate income and support her family.

Born in Beit Hanoun, Jamila is helping her family financially after her four brothers were killed during various years of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza strip.

"Really, what made me do this hard work is the difficult economic situation. There is no [income] provider in our home. My four brothers were martyred. There's nobody to provide for us and that's what made me to this job," she said.

The 39 year-old single woman, who is one of the very few women working in cement factory in the besieged territory, says she started working at the Abu Eida factory three years ago and now works twice a week for ten hours each day.

"We work by the ton, each ton is 10 shekels, so in a day, it's 100 shekels, a day," she said.

Israel tightened the blockade after Hamas, an Islamist group that refuses to recognize the Jewish state, took power seven years ago. The isolation has forced the Gaza economy to almost entirely depend on foreign aid, as unemployment and poverty levels continue to rise.

Gaza unemployment is estimated by the United Nations to be at more than 40 percent, and local economists put the figure at around 60 percent.

Officials estimate unemployment amongst women in Gaza to be at 95 percent.

Jamila's father Atia Abu Oushiba said that she is the only breadwinner to his family.

"Her brothers were martyred and there are children without someone to provide for them, her brother's children. And her mother is sick, so she was forced to work to pay for their needs. As you know they have schools and universities [to pay for]," he explained.

"All the women who had such an experience their economic life is very tough. For Jamila whoever will read [about her] or visit Jamila at her home will see how poor her life is and [how poor] her family where she lives, so all the respect for the women's initiatives who are trying to protect her life and her family," said Amal Seyam, head of woman's affairs center in Gaza.

Palestinian women rights organizations said that high unemployment has forced women to seek out jobs that traditionally appeal to men.