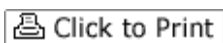


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## Palestinian policewomen begin work

- Story Highlights
- First class of Palestinian policewomen completed EU-sponsored training program
- Roles of authority for women are widely frowned upon
- Latest EU count found 500 women, 18,000 men in Palestinian civil police service

**RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP)** -- Palestinian pedestrians gawked at the unusual sight of female police officers directing traffic in Ramallah on Wednesday, the first batch of women to venture into a job traditionally reserved for men in the West Bank.

The women wore uniforms of navy blue pants and light blue shirts and many donned navy blue headscarves, a sign of Muslim modesty. Some male police officers sneered at the women as they directed traffic and kept pedestrians from jaywalking on their first day on the job.

The new recruits are part of the first class of Palestinian policewomen who recently completed a European Union-sponsored training program, part of a broader EU effort to improve ill-equipped Palestinian law enforcement agencies.

In addition to directing traffic, their duties also include conducting traffic patrols, house searches and security checks on women in prisons and universities.

Roles of authority for women are widely frowned upon in conservative Palestinian society, but several bystanders said they were impressed.

"This is wonderful -- watching Palestinian women enforcing law and order," said Fuad Murar, 59.

Ashjan Abu Srour, a 23-year-old policewoman, wore an Islamic headscarf, as she coaxed an elderly couple to walk on the sidewalk, not on the road.

"I was a little afraid in the beginning, because our society imposes a certain lifestyle for women," Abu Srour said. "But now, after spending some time in the street, I am not afraid."

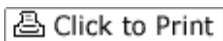
According to the most recent EU count, the overall number of females in the Palestinian civil police service was only 500 compared to more than 18,000 men. The women were confined mostly to clerical and administrative duties.

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