

**TED ANTALYA
MODEL UNITED
NATIONS 2019**



Forum: UN Women

Issue: The situation and assistance of Palestinian women

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INTRODUCTION

Palestinian women have been suffering from both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the violence by their family members. Their actions of activism first started in 1920s against the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and continued with the aim of gaining their basic rights. Palestinian women have been struggling for their rights and peace within their nation.

There are no specific laws or provisions in the region that protect women against domestic and sexual violence. Passing new laws or amending the existing laws that are deemed discriminatory towards women and in contradiction with the human rights can be, the possible solution of this very problem.

Israeli violence against Palestinian women is routine. The United Nations Human Rights Council special rapporteur on violence against women notes that the “establishments and expansion of settlements has been accompanied by an increase in settlers’ violence against Palestinians, including women and girls.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT): All competent legal authorities - including the International Court of Justice, the United Nations Security Council and Israel's own Supreme Court recognize the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights as occupied territories.

Palestinian Authority (PA): The PA is intended to represent the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Mandate: authority to act in a particular way given to a government or a person, especially as a result of a vote or ruling.

Zionist Movement: a movement of world Jewry that arose late in the 19th century with the aim of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

Intifada: Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

The Oslo Accords: The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993; and the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba, Egypt, in 1995. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and at fulfilling the "right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Hunger Strike: a prolonged refusal to eat, carried out as a protest by a prisoner.

Shari`a: traditional Islamic religious law primarily based on the Quran; it covers the totality of religious, political, social and private life, making no distinction between religion and life – in other words between transgressions of moral rules (sin) and of social rules.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Since the 1920s, Palestinian women's activism has been developed through and organically linked to the resistance movement and hence women have shared the nation's fortunes, responsibilities and aspirations for freedom and sovereignty. Studies on the early women's movement(s) in Palestine show that the early activities of women's activism in the 1920s were consisted of demonstrations and sending letters of condemnation to the British High Commissioner denouncing the practices of the British Mandate and the Zionist movement in Palestine. Later in the 1930s, their acts evolved to include boycotting the products of the Israeli colonies, mainly those goods that were produced and manufactured by Jewish corporations, as well as foreign products, namely, those developed and manufactured in Great Britain and other British colonies around the world. It should also be noted that the early acts by Palestinian women did not focus on feminism and excluded extreme political participation.

Women's activism, continued in relatively the same way until the early 1960s, a period of time which witnessed the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964. The emergence of the PLO is considered a major turning point in the history of the Palestinian nationalist movement, thus, in the Palestinian women's movement. With the establishment of the PLO quickly came the establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in 1965 as an official body within the PLO. Accordingly, GUPW is considered, even today, to be the official representative body for Palestinian women around the world. Yet, despite the lack of attention to women's cases, women cadres played a leading role in the politics – the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East political participation refers to the involvement in a variety of community mobilization activities, which include but are not limited to civil disobedience, going out on demonstrations, distributing pamphlets, which were then considered illegal, organizing public marches, attending town hall meetings, launching fundraising campaigns in Jerusalem in the period following 1967. The involvement of Palestinian women in political parties had a positive impact as it indicated their awareness of the significance of taking part in the political movement. It is worth pointing out that the charitable model continued to be the dominant framework that governed women's activism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the decade following the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967.

The First Palestinian Intifada (“uprising”) (1987-1990)

The Palestinian Intifada was considered a major defining moment in the timeline of women's movements in Palestine and gave momentum to their involvement in national activism. For example, women organized demonstrations and protests; many women were martyred and hundreds of women were detained by the Israeli government. In addition, women had to take on the role of the primary source of income to their families, especially in situations where the man of the household was detained or martyred. Nevertheless, this momentum was crushed in the peak of the Intifada in 1989 due to the escalating violent actions of the Israeli military occupation. As a result, the suppression of the Intifada constituted a significant setback for the development of the Palestinian women's movement.

The Oslo Accords (1993- 2000)

The Oslo Accords period was a setback to the popular uprising and was considered a turning point for the Palestinian national movement and its transformation towards a more organized and well-established cluster of political parties. Yet, the relationship between these parties and the public sphere, including women's movement, took a bureaucratic form. They were successful in prioritizing a feminist agenda and pushing the conventional women's movement in the Palestinian territories to adopt items on that agenda. Palestinian women's activism during the Oslo Accords and post-Oslo Accords phase focused mostly on the social issues of women; this was in line with the state-building phase that the PLO and other political parties were undergoing at the time. The focus was on legislation concerning women's issues and women's participation in decision-making positions. In fact, Palestinian women's activism aimed towards the achievement of the social and civil rights of women. Outside, donor countries dedicated a major role on the women's movement agenda to ensure alliance with the post-Oslo phase. Especially, most of the women's programs that were supported by these donors were detached from the grassroots. In the early 1990s, women's organizations occurred, where the feminist NGOs came to play an important and highly controversial role in the revolutionary women's movement.

The Second Intifada (2000)

The Second Intifada showed a decline in women's participation against the Israeli occupation in comparison to the First Intifada between 1987 and 1990. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, over 300 Palestinian women have been arrested as the suspects of the occupation. Today, approximately 126 women prisoners are still incarcerated, including 12 children (under the age of 18).

Violence

Recently, a great number of women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are victims of violence perpetrated by family members, intimate partners, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian government. While there is an increasing recognition of the problem and some Palestinian Authority (PA) officials have indicated their concern to impose a more forceful response, little action has been taken to seriously address these acts of abuse. Indeed, there is proof of the level of violence that is getting worse while the remedies available to victims are being further eroded.

**Since violation against women has a significant role on this agenda I will also focus on the reasons of continuing violation and PA's unsuccessful attempts to respond effectively to such violence.*

Two primary obstacles were found standing in the way of enhanced protection against domestic violence for Palestinian women and girls: discriminatory laws that condone and perpetuate such violence and the virtual absence of institutionalized policies to prevent violence, assist victims, and hold perpetrators accountable. Essentially, victims of physical and sexual violence pay the price for the abuse they suffer, while the perpetrators usually get off without punishment.

Firstly, Palestinian police officers lack specialized expertise to handle domestic violence complaints with the level of sensitivity and professionalism required from the law

enforcement personnel, often turn to informal measures rather than serious investigations and remedies. Human Rights Watch interviewed Palestinian police officers, including chiefs of police, who disregarded the severity of violence against women in the OPT and questioned the need for their involvement in the dissemination of potentially life-saving information to victims.

The Ministry of Health has no medical procedures or protocols to educate medical professionals or ministry staff in their treatment of domestic violence cases. As a result, doctors lack specialized training and guidance on how to treat victims of violence, preserve evidence of the abuse, and maintain confidentiality. Palestinian social workers reported a number of cases of doctors disclosing without consent confidential patient information, putting the lives of victims of violence even more at risk.

The protective mechanisms created or overseen by the PA to shelter victims of violence are also insufficient and often inaccessible. In Gaza, there are no shelters for victims of violence, resulting in a serious insufficiency in protection.

Women's second-class status in economic, social and political life translates into a lack of decision-making power in the family, even on the most personal aspects of their lives. Male family members (usually their fathers) often arrange marriages for Palestinian girls, even before adulthood. In a survey of 1,446 Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, the PCBS found that only 56.5 percent had chosen their husband. In rural areas, only 36 percent of the 460 women polled had chosen their husbands themselves.

Moreover, as children everywhere, Palestinian children, particularly girls, are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse within the family and appropriate laws are needed to protect them. In a survey published in 2005, the PCBS found that 51.4 percent of Palestinian mothers believed that at least one of their children (aged 5 to 17) was exposed to violence, with most of such abuse (93.3 percent) being inflicted by family members. In another study, close to 80 percent of Palestinian girls aged 5 to 17 reported that they were exposed to violence in their home. Victims of sexual violence are particularly stigmatized in Palestinian society. Women and girls who report rape or incest are at high risk of further abuse and even murder by family members seeking. In addition to the fear of being blamed or harmed by family members as a result of the attack, several legal obstacles stand in the way of victims seeking justice for sexual violence in the Palestinian courts. These obstacles include discriminatory and abusive laws that prohibit minors from pressing charges for incest and allow the courts to suspend the sentences of rapists who agree to marry their victim.

As Palestinians have lost faith in reform of the judicial system, they have turned increasingly to "traditional" means of settling disputes through the informal justice system. The informal justice system runs parallel to the formal system and seeks reconciliation between parties rather than a judicial or penal remedy. The system is run by "informal judges" who usually inherit their positions from fathers or grandfathers and who must be well-respected, powerful members of the community.

Palestinian women and girls who report abuse to the authorities find themselves confronting a system that prioritizes the reputations of their families in the community over their own well-being and lives. Accordingly, police officers and chieftains regularly "mediate" and "resolve" these cases, typically by returning the abused women to the "care and protection" of her attacker, without ever referring the case to the courts or the woman to social or other services she might need. Essentially, victims of physical and sexual violence pay the price for the abuse they suffer, while the perpetrators usually get off scot-free. Few cases of sexual violence are ever prosecuted in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the PCBS, in 2004 the

PA courts reportedly convicted only one person of rape in Gaza and convicted no one in the West Bank. These numbers are not consistent with reported levels of rape in the OPT.

The killing of female relatives under the guise of family "honour" is a serious physical threat to Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza. A Palestinian woman's life is at risk if she is suspected of engaging in behaviour her family or community considers taboo, such as talking with a man who is not her husband or a blood relative (even in a public place), refusing to tell a close male relative where she has been and with whom, or marrying someone without the approval of her family. In short, for doing or being suspected to have done anything that is perceived to bring dishonour on herself and on her family.

Social service providers working in NGOs are also at risk of violence. According to several NGO social workers who did not wish to be identified, family members of their clients sometimes subject them to threats, intimidation, and violence. These professionals face great personal risk when they help women and girls escape from abusive families and confront perpetrators of abuse. Several women's rights activists spoke to Human Rights Watch about the failure of the PA to protect not only their clients, but also themselves, as service providers

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)

A Palestinian NGO established in 1965 as one of the leading bases of Palestinian Liberation Organization. The GUPW aims at organizing and reinforcing the participation of Palestinian women at the political, social and economic levels, and enhances women empowerment and development to enable them to participate effectively at all levels. This is done through working with the different political parties in the OPT. It's aims are raising political awareness of women and enhancing participation in decision making at the levels of political parties, unions and grassroots; revising policies, legislations and laws to ensure non-discrimination against women and ensuring gender equality and equal opportunities among women and men, enabling women to take part in the PLO more effectively and engaging women in the labour market or any other economic activity. Also, insuring better cultural and health conditions of Palestinian women through organizing the basic education programs and fighting illiteracy.

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)

The 1991-founded Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) functions as an umbrella organisation uniting various women's groups and coordinating their social and political activism. In its early phase its main focus was to integrate gender issues in peace- and state-building. Towards the late 1990s, when it had become clear that the Oslo peace process would not materialise, WATC changed its agenda and focused predominantly on gendering the state-building process. WATC, together with the GUPW and some of the independent women's NGOs, has been organising campaigns on less controversial topics, such as women's practical needs or their political and civil rights. Although WATC has managed to build strong grassroots support, it did not succeed in uniting the women's movement; the Islamic women's groups still do not form a genuine part of WATC. The post-Oslo Palestinian women's movement is, thus characterised by strong divisions, particularly around the issue of women's rights in the private sphere.

The Association of Women Committees for Social Work (AWCSW)

It is a leading Palestinian women’s association that is known for its wide networks, innovative approaches, and intensive field work. AWCSW has developed a deep insight into the problems that Palestinian women are facing and established efficient methods to address sensitive social issues. AWCSW is considered a pioneer for its work, especially in the marginalized communities in Palestine. ‘Mission Our’s overall aim is to attain gender-equality in a democratic Palestinian society, to which end focuses our efforts on promoting the social, educational, economical, and political development of Palestinian women and also puts great effort in raising the legal awareness of women in order to promote their participation in decision-making processes, to protect their rights and to encourage development.

Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD)

It was established in 1981, is a Palestinian women’s, mass, developmental, learning human rights organization that contributes to developing the feminist struggle within national, social, and developmental dimensions. The organization believes that liberating women is directly connected with ending the occupation and establishing a full Palestinian democratic sovereign civil state. PWWSD is a reference for women and all those individuals or institutions interested in women’s issues. PWWSD is active all-over West Bank and Gaza Strip and an active member in several local, regional and global networks and coalitions, such as the Palestinian NGO Network, the Arab Women Network (Aisha), the International Union for Workers Education.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

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January 1920	Women Rally in Jerusalem - Palestinian women march to the British High Commissioner Headquarters; six women shot dead by the British Mandate troops
26 October 1929	1st Palestine Arab Women Congress Is Held in Jerusalem. About 300 women representing various parts of Palestine meet in the 1st Palestine Arab Women Congress, held in Jerusalem.
Start Date: Saturday, 15 Oct 1938 End Date: Tuesday, 18 Oct 1938	Eastern Women's Conference on the Palestine problem was held
6 July 1963	The Eastern Women's Congress in Defence of Palestine was held in Cairo
26 January 1969	Hunger Strike of Palestinian Women in Jerusalem
1980	UPWC (Union of Palestinian Women's Committees) established by PFLP(Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine)
1981	AWCSW (The Association of Women Committees for Social Work) was established

1981	PWWSD (Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development) was established.
1993	Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) formed as an advisory women's body.
September 2000	The second Palestinian Intifada erupted, the new Intifada took militant path, and women's involvement was diminished compared to the first Intifada of 1987.
November 2002	The post of a Minister of Women's Affairs initiated by decree from Chairman Arafat; Zahira Kamal first woman appointed for this post.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

In the 1990s, after the first *intifada* and the signing of the Oslo Accords, women activists focused on gender equality in the emerging institutions and laws of the new PA. In 1994, Palestinian women drafted a "Memorandum of Women's Rights" and submitted it to the PA. The document endorsed the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and stressed the need of justice, democracy, and gender equality in the nascent Palestinian state structures.

In 1994, women's organizations and their allies launched an ambitious five-year process called the "Model Parliament" to debate the inherited Jordanian and Egyptian family laws still in place in the OPT and suggest changes based on gender equality. However, the women's movement was divided between those who called for a civil family law and those who felt that their best chance to influence the provisions of a new unified Palestinian family law was to push for a more progressive interpretation of *shari`a*.

Palestinian women have also been active in networks at the regional and international level. In 1995, a Palestinian delegation participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Based on the standards set by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for the inclusion of women in peace processes, women's NGOs established an International Women's Commission in July 2005 that aims to include Palestinian, Israeli, and international women in all future peace negotiations. At the beginning of 2005, a network of five women's organizations in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza created a group called

Salma to launch a campaign to criminalize domestic violence. The group has drafted a family protection law and has begun trainings and public education on the issue of family violence.

In addition, women's NGOs launched a Palestinian Violence against Women Forum in 2002, a network of 13 NGOs working collectively to combat gender-based violence. Many of these NGOs already ran hotlines and provide legal and social work services for victims of violence. Through the Forum, they set up an informal referral service so that victims can get specialized advice and services. The Forum is pressing the PA to set up an official governmental referral system. Forum members have also participated in demonstrations, public service announcements, awareness-raising activities, and evaluations of draft legislation concerning violence against women.

Other achievements of the Palestinian women's movement are the creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in 2003, headed until recently by a leading women's activist, Zahira Kamal and the creation of gender desks within various ministries. The MOWA's mandate includes monitoring the government's compliance with the terms of gender equality laid out in the Basic Law through "capacity building at the governmental level, improving the government's policies, laws and legislations, adopting the necessary plans for ensuring the government's commitment to the integration of gender in its development plans, the execution and the implementation of positive discrimination policies towards women. The Ministry has the authority to review draft laws and propose new ones. However, Ministry staff and women's NGOs complain that the PA often dismisses the Ministry's recommendations and that they receive little financial support. For instance, the MOWA received only 0.02 percent of the ministerial budget in 2005.

RELEVANT UN DOCUMENTS AND TREATIES

Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women – Commission on Status of Women – ECOSOC Resolution (E/RES/2017/10)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201110/20111027ATT30536/20111027ATT30536EN.pdf>

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/palestinian-women-commission-on-the-status-of-women-press-release-excerpts-5/>

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

I would like to warn the delegates especially about the fact that we are UN Women Committee so we don't have the authority to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, I encourage you not to attempt writing clauses that include terms like "Urges" "Demands" and etc. to put an end to the conflict but instead refer the issues present in the OPT to either the Security Council or the European Court of Human Rights. I also would remind you that Palestinian women's main problem is not the conflict as it is commonly presumed. Therefore, please pay attention to the other issues that are stated in the chair report. For example, PA has failed to undertake many practical and achievable initiatives such as adequately surveying the rate of violence against women, setting up government-run hotlines and additional shelters, providing basic guidelines to police and service providers on how to handle gender-based violence complaints they receive, and initiating public education efforts aimed at reducing

violence against women. PA also failed to act diligently to prevent, investigate, and punish violence against women, putting women's health and lives in danger. Therefore, we as the UN Women Committee must find adequate and sufficient solutions to this ongoing conflict.

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