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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

**Joint written statement* submitted by the International
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination (EAFORD), Arab Organization for Human
Rights, International-Lawyers.Org, Union of Arab Jurists,
non-governmental organizations in special consultative
status, International Educational Development, Inc., World
Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Socioeconomic Situation of Palestinian Women*

The Israeli occupation leaves its marks on the entire Palestinian population – regardless of residence, gender, religion, political opinion, age or other status. However, its impact on women is compounded due to its interaction with patriarchal social structures. This becomes manifest in two ways: First, in discriminatory legislation, institutions, and practices by the Occupying Power that disproportionately affect Palestinian women. Second, it is reflected in the perpetuation of intra-societal and intra-family discrimination and violence against women. This submission focuses on the grave impact of this twofold oppression on women’s economic, social and cultural rights. Notably, Israeli violations such as the Separation Wall and other barriers to movement as well as military action have a gender-specific impact and pose a substantial risk for (expectant) mothers, female students and workers, resulting in systematic denial of their socioeconomic rights.

Right to Family Life

Women tend to carry the heaviest burden as the right to family life is denied¹. The protracted Israeli system of permits and impediments to family unification prevent Palestinians with different residency statuses (West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Israel or another nationality) from obtaining residency rights and legally residing together¹. For instance, Palestinians with West Bank residency permits are prevented from joining their families in East Jerusalem, while Palestinians with Gaza identification cards are prohibited from residing with their spouses in the West Bank. Women are disproportionately affected by these arrangements as they are traditionally expected to live with their husbands’ families. This also implies that women who marry a person without permanent residence status and move in with the family-in-law lose their residency rights in Jerusalem.

Girls continue to be forced into early marriages and to be denied the right to choose their own spouses. According to 2014 data by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), girls are disproportionately affected by early marriage, with 43 percent of registered marriages involving a bride of 14-19 years old, compared to less than 0.01 percent of grooms.

This is especially due to difficult socioeconomic conditions and the climate of fear resulting from the security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which force families to marry girls off at an earlier age to ease financial pressure on households and to ensure the protection of young girls. Under the Israeli-imposed blockade on Gaza, child marriage remains particularly widespread, owing to extreme socioeconomic hardship that compels families to arranging marriages to reduce the number of mouths to feed. In East Jerusalem, impoverishment and the denial of social services have increased early marriages in recent years. The prevailing sense is also that young girls are better protected if married in the face of a constant threat of violence on the part of Israeli soldiers and settlers, particularly in vulnerable areas around settlements and military bases. Early marriages tend to come to the detriment of women’s education and physical and psychological wellbeing. Affected young women often walk the path of limited education, domestic work, high fertility and poverty.

Adequate Standard of Living

¹ Israel’s laws and practices governing entry and residence and family reunification, inter alia, the denial and revocation of residency statuses, discriminate against the Palestinian population. Palestinian women face a myriad of obstacles to their right to family life regardless of their Israeli-allocated legal-political statuses - none of which entail full citizenship rights, in accordance with Israel’s principle of prioritizing Jewish descent over birth on the territory or residence. The Palestinian people have been geographically and legally divided into the Palestinian citizens of Israel, permanent residents of East Jerusalem, West Bank identity card holders, Gaza Strip identity card holders, stateless persons, and the millions of Palestinian refugees living in forced exile.

Women are hardest hit by Israeli policies and practices inhibiting an adequate standard of living². Women – especially those residing in Area C, Hebron and East Jerusalem – face extreme barriers to access to vital services, utilities, shelter and livelihoods. The discriminatory provision of basic services, such as health, education and welfare services, water and sewage infrastructure and roads, deepen the impoverishment and diminish socioeconomic rights of Palestinian women.

The inhibited access to quality water and sanitation due to physical barriers, settlements and military structures in the West Bank and the siege, electricity crisis and destruction of water and sanitation facilities in Gaza signifies that women have to afford more time and efforts to domestic work to cope with the shortages and are forced to resort to contaminated or risky alternatives to run their households.

The mass arrests of Palestinian men increase women's economic and household responsibilities to provide the livelihood for their families. As a result, women often have to maintain their households while simultaneously providing for their families as sole breadwinners. While they face these challenges without any social assistance and support, they are also often confronted with social pressures and stigmatization.

The impact of house demolitions and forced displacement on women is also disproportionate. Not only do women lose their homes, they are often submitted to more intense domestic violence as they become guests in relative's houses, where they see their traditional role and status diminish as they have little control over the domestic sphere. This often creates intra-family tensions and domestic violence. As primary caregivers women are also responsible for the wellbeing of their children, who may suffer psychological trauma due to the destruction of their homes and disruption of their lives due to forced displacement.

Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health

While the health sector continues to face significant challenges resulting from the impact of the Israeli occupation, women in particular are increasingly affected by chronic diseases. Women of reproductive age often suffer from malnutrition and anemia – mostly associated with early marriage and successive pregnancies. Women's mental health is gravely affected by the political situation, particularly by the exposure to frequent military incursions and intense violence. While men are more likely to be confronted with physical security risks, women carry away substantial psychological problems due to death, injury or arrest of family members, and due to an ever-present threat of night raids, detentions of children, and settler violence.

This leads to high levels of stress-related and psychosocial disorder, with women suffering from chronic depression, psychic numbing, and further impairments on the cognitive and emotional level. High levels of nervousness, anxiety and hypertension are common, particularly during military operations in Gaza. A sense of insecurity is omnipresent in access restricted areas, where communities are isolated due to movement restrictions, homes are under constant threat of demolition and families are exposed to attacks by soldiers and settlers. Women carry the additional burden of trying to keep a sense of normalcy for their families under the violent reality of occupation. In the meantime, the security situation and movement restrictions prevent them from accessing direly needed psychological assistance.

Israeli restrictions pose substantial obstacles to health services for women in vulnerable areas, notably in Area C. Women's right to appropriate healthcare is fundamentally shaken as a result of Israeli restrictions on movement, including medical personnel and medicines, and the PA's fiscal crisis. In Gaza, the blockade, recurrent military offensives, and cuts in electricity and fuel have devastated the healthcare system, causing a chronic shortage of essential medicines and equipment. While medical referrals are often denied, women face a higher rejection rate, with only 43.4 percent of female patients being transferred as compared with 56.6 percent of men. During the 2014 war on Gaza, more than 40,000 pregnant women were unable to receive basic reproductive health care. Consequently, neonatal mortality sharply increased from 7 percent to 14 percent at Al-Shifa Hospital, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

² The socioeconomic insecurity stems from Israel's restrictions on the movement of goods and people, the appropriation of natural resources, the discriminatory land zoning and planning regime, and large-scale destruction of agriculture, industries, and vital services. In Gaza, the Israeli siege and the cuts in electricity by Israel and the Palestinian Authority have deepened the food, fuel and electricity crises.

The denial of healthcare also gravely affects women indirectly as they usually attend to the health needs of children and the elderly.

Right to Work

In spite of higher educational enrollment and attainment rates in schools and universities³, women's access to the labor market is obstructed and striking gender disparities persist with regards to unemployment, wages, and participation in the formal labor market. The labor force participation rate was 19.1 percent for women as compared to 71.9 for men (PCBS, 2015). Thus, the majority of employable women are prevented from entering the labor force, with highly educated women being least represented. The unemployment rate among women amounts to 39.2 percent, while 22.5 percent of men are unemployed (PCBS, 2015).

The gender gap can primarily be ascribed to Israeli restrictions on access to natural resources and movement, sociocultural norms, and institutional barriers. This obstructs women's economic advancement and empowerment, thereby negatively influencing Palestinian sustainable development. When women do participate in the labor market, they encounter different forms of gender discrimination. Their economic participation is limited to a few professions⁴, primarily in lower-paying jobs in the service and agricultural sector. Women in Gaza are predominantly employed as cleaners, caretakers, or engage in family agricultural work. Women involved in informal work are denied basic rights such as health insurance and paid sick leave. Moreover, wages of female workers are considerably lower than those of their male counterparts. The average daily wage for wage employees is NIS 108 for men and NIS 81.9 for women (PCBS, 2015).

Women who become sole breadwinners after losing their husbands in military operations or to prisons often face severe discrimination in the job market, becoming socioeconomically marginalized.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women's socioeconomic situation is gravely affected by the Israeli occupation, which violates their fundamental rights directly and indirectly – by entrenching intra-societal and intra-family discrimination and violence against women. Moreover, the occupation obstructs Palestinian domestic reform towards women's rights. The signatories of this statement are convinced that only an end to the occupation and the realization of Palestinians' inalienable rights, including self-determination in their independent State of Palestine, can bring about an end to the violations and substantive change towards gender equality and women's rights. We, the undersigning organizations, therefore recommend to the HRC and other relevant UN bodies to:

- Take all necessary measures to finally end Israel's prolonged occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and fulfill Palestinians' right to national self-determination, which involves the end of all annexationist and settlement activity and the illegal and destructive blockade on Gaza.

³ While educational enrollment and attainment rates are higher for Palestinian girls, girls are affected more strongly by Israeli interferences with the right to education, such as military raids at schools and movement restrictions implying frequent interaction with soldiers at checkpoints. To ensure protection, some families marry their girls off early or ask them to stay home rather than pursuing higher education. Women in the segregated school systems in occupied East Jerusalem and Israel record higher dropout rates and smaller representation in institutions of higher education as compared to their Jewish counterparts. Palestinian educational facilities and quality are negatively affected by Israeli policies and practices, inter alia, discriminatory allocation of funds to Palestinian schools, restrictions on school development, active destruction of school infrastructure and facilities, military incursions and closures, and settler violence.

⁴ For instance, the gender gaps holding the professions of judges (84.4 percent female/15.6 percent male), lawyers (77.5/22.5), ambassadors (94.2/5.8), cabinet members (88/12) police (96.2/3.8), and engineers (78.9/21.1) are striking.

We specifically call on the HRC to ensure that Israel:

- Puts an immediate end to its occupation and apartheid policies and practices that disproportionately affect Palestinian women;
- Fully complies with the fundamental provisions of CEDAW in all areas under its effective control.

*Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, The Brussels Tribunal, Rural Women Development Society (RWDS), Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Human Rights & Democracy Media Center “SHAMS”, Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Youth Against Settlements (YAS), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights (ICHR), International Anti-Occupation Network (IAON), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

1 The status of “permanent residents” of East Jerusalemites does not entail a constitutional right to residency but is conditioned upon physical presence in Jerusalem (permanent domicile, “center of life”) which must be constantly proven in interaction with the Israeli Interior Minister. It is therefore subject to expiration and revocation at any point in time. Under the Entry into Israel Ordinances, the status of “permanent resident” expires in case the holder resides outside of “Israel” (annexed East Jerusalem) for more than seven years, receives residency status in another country, or receives citizenship in that country. For these purposes, the West Bank and Gaza have been considered “outside of Israel” by the Israeli authorities and courts since 1996. Palestinian East Jerusalemites possessing a Jerusalem Identity Card who cannot prove that their “center of life”, i.e. their workplace and residence, is in East Jerusalem but elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory lose their residency status. On the basis of this law, tens of thousands of Palestinian East Jerusalemites have had their status revoked.

If a “permanent resident” marries someone without Jerusalem Identity Card, he or she has to apply for family reunification, and if one wants to register a child as a Jerusalem resident one can only do so if the father owns a Jerusalem Identity Card. The applications entail a long-winded and expensive bureaucratic process, at whose end the request may be denied on grounds of failure to prove Jerusalem as “center of life” or security reservations.

In 2002 Israel suspended the naturalization procedures of Palestinian spouses and prohibits Palestinian residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territory to reside in Israel with their spouses.

Palestinian citizens of Israel wishing to be reunited with their families in Israel are prohibited from extending their citizenship to Palestinian spouses from the Occupied Palestinian Territory as well as to their children.

Under the sweeping restrictions of family unification, thousands of Palestinian children are robbed of their right to live and grow up in a family environment with both of their parents or with their siblings and live under the constant fear of separation.

Persons who do not hold a West Bank permit issued by the military commander can be subject to forcible transfer or deportation to Gaza. Especially Palestinians holding residency permits with addresses in the Gaza Strip, even if they were born and live in the West Bank, were being forcibly returned. Even if a Palestinian resident of Gaza marries a West Bank resident, is employed, resides, and has children in the West Bank, the status of “illegal resident” remains. Therefore, s/he is subjected to a constant threat of expulsion.

Israeli authorities refuse the renewal of visas of Palestinians with foreign passports, many of whom who had lived in the Occupied Palestinian Territory for years and were now refused re-entry, and thereby deprived of reunification with their families.