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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2014/1, highlights the situation of Palestinian women for the period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014, and provides an overview of the assistance provided by the entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

* E/CN.6/2015/1.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2014/1 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the critical socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women ([E/CN.6/2014/6](#)), and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from the United Nations entities and individual experts that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the State of Palestine.¹

3. Unless indicated otherwise, the report is based on contributions and information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including ESCWA. The present report includes contributions from the following United Nations entities: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It complements other reports on the living and socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian people (see [A/69/84-E/2014/75](#), [A/69/371-S/2014/650](#), [A/69/81-E/2014/13](#) and [A/69/13](#)).

II. Situation of Palestinian women

4. During the reporting period renewed efforts were made to resume direct final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians under the auspices of the United States. Despite an intensified direct engagement between the parties for a period of nine months starting in July 2013, an agreement failed to emerge and talks

¹ In accordance with the report of the Secretary-General on the status of Palestine in the United Nations dated 8 March 2013 ([A/67/738](#)), the designation "State of Palestine" is now used in all documents of the United Nations, notwithstanding the use in parallel of the term used in previous reports, "Occupied Palestinian Territory".

have been suspended since the end of April 2014. Israeli settlement announcements accompanying each tranche of agreed release of Palestinian prisoners complicated negotiation efforts. At the end of March 2014, Israel did not release the fourth tranche of prisoners, citing lack of political progress within the peace talks, and the State of Palestine moved to accede to 15 international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which have since come into effect. Following a reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas on 23 April 2014, a Government of National Consensus was formed on 2 June 2014 in accordance with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commitments and the positions of the Quartet and Arab Peace Initiative.²

5. The situation in the West Bank deteriorated with a rise in violence and several disturbing developments, including the abduction and killing of three Israeli teenagers followed by the abduction and killing of a Palestinian teenager, continued settlement expansion, settler violence, land expropriation, the demolition of Palestinian houses and a high number of arrests of Palestinians, including Hamas affiliates, and confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli forces and settlers. During this period of heightened tensions, rocket fire at Israel from militants in the Gaza Strip increased. Israel responded mostly with airstrikes. The security situation began to dramatically unravel on 7 July after Hamas, for the first time in 20 months and following the arrest of hundreds of its members in the West Bank, claimed responsibility for firing a barrage of rockets towards Israel. On 8 July, Israel launched “Operation Protective Edge”, with the stated goal of stopping rocket attacks and destroying Hamas’ capability to conduct operations against Israel, including by destroying tunnels. On 26 August, an open-ended ceasefire brokered by Egypt went into effect and has largely held since.

6. The 51-day conflict — the third major one in six years — left an unprecedented level of loss of life and destruction. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 2,100 Palestinians, including 1,475 civilians (709 men, 260 women and 506 children) were killed. Additionally, over 11,100 Palestinians, including 3,374 children, 2,088 women and 410 elderly were injured.³ Sixty-six Israeli soldiers and six civilians, including a child and a foreign national, were killed and 250 Israeli civilians and 450 soldiers were injured. In Gaza, an estimated 18,000 houses were destroyed or severely damaged, as were 111 UNRWA installations and critical infrastructure, including Gaza’s only power plant. At the peak of the conflict, more than 500,000 people were internally displaced with around 293,000 of those taking shelter in UNRWA schools, 100,000 people lost their homes and continue to be displaced.

7. On 23 July 2014, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution S-21/1, in which it decided to establish an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military operations conducted since 13 June 2014, and to report to the Council at its twenty-eighth

² The Quartet asked that all members of future Palestinian Governments be committed to non-violence, the recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

³ Data from the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

session in March 2015. A technical gender expert deployed by UN-Women is supporting the investigations.

8. The conflict has had a devastating impact on women and their families, further increasing vulnerability and insecurity. As the primary caregivers in Gaza, women are faced with acute challenges in coping with the large number of families with members killed or injured, the long-term impact of damaged infrastructure and reduced services. Displacement proved especially difficult for women and girls with reports of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in shelters, limited privacy, compromised dignity and reduced access to hygiene.⁴ Psychosocial distress levels, already high among the Gaza population, have worsened significantly as a result of the conflict and will require specialized support, specifically for children and women.⁴ Female-headed families, including new widows, are a priority group in need of protection and support.

9. In the West Bank, tensions and violent clashes between Palestinians, Israeli security forces and settlers resulted in a marked increase in civilian deaths and injury during the reporting period compared with the previous year. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,⁵ in the West Bank, 44 Palestinian civilians (34 men and 10 boys) were killed and 4,611 were injured (3,497 men, 92 women, 970 boys and 52 girls) by the Israeli Defense Forces, while 145 Palestinians (99 men, 10 women, 30 boys and 6 girls) were injured by Israeli settlers. Seventy-eight Israeli settlers (58 men, 8 women, 8 boys and 4 girls) were injured by Palestinians.

10. The ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the closure of the Gaza Strip, continued to affect the social and economic situation of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory. The living conditions of women vary depending on sociocultural factors and the differential status that applies to Palestinian women and men in different areas⁶ and related obstacles to movement and access. As at September 2014, some 1.8 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip remained effectively isolated from the rest of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by the continuing closure by Israel. Access to East Jerusalem has remained limited for Palestinian residents from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Physical and administrative restrictions continue to impede humanitarian access to some of the most vulnerable communities in Area C, and particularly those in the firing zone and those located behind the Barrier.

11. Food insecurity levels in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained high at 33 per cent (57 per cent in Gaza Strip and 19 per cent in the West Bank),⁷ as a result of the continued closure of the Gaza Strip, restrictions on access in the West Bank and related high rates of poverty and continued increases in food prices and threats to livelihoods. Since food insecurity is defined in the Palestinian context as the lack

⁴ Gaza Crisis Appeal, September 2014 Update (available from: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Gaza_Crisis_Appeal_9_September.pdf (accessed September 2014).

⁵ Figures cover the period 1 October 2013 to 30 August 2014.

⁶ Following the 1993 Oslo Accords and the 1995 interim Agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the West Bank was divided into three zones, Areas A, B and C. Extensive responsibility was delegated by Israel to the Palestinian Authority in Areas A and B. Area C remained under full authority of Israel.

⁷ FAO, UNRWA, WFP and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Socioeconomic and food security survey 2013: West Bank and Gaza Strip" (unpublished information).

of economic access to food, trends of food insecurity are driven by economic performance. The situation in the West Bank worsened compared to last year, when food insecurity stood at 14 per cent.

12. Female-headed households account for only 9.8 per cent of all families in occupied Palestinian territory (8.3 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 10.5 per cent in the West Bank). Latest available data⁷ indicate that 26 per cent of female-headed households in the West Bank are food insecure compared to 18 per cent of the male-headed households. In the Gaza Strip the situation is the reverse, as a result of external assistance targeting female-headed households. Food insecurity among those households is 51 per cent, compared to 58 per cent among male-headed households. In Gaza, food insecurity is estimated to have increased as a result of the recent conflict and the high levels of displacement, the inability of the population to access their livelihoods, especially agriculture, and increased unemployment rates. This is expected to contribute to a deterioration of the nutritional status of women and children.⁸

13. Women continue to face significant challenges in the labour market. The labour force participation rate among women remained low at 16 per cent (compared to 65.8 per cent for men) in Gaza and 18 per cent (compared to 71.3 per cent for men) in the West Bank. Available data shows that women's unemployment rates remained high during the reporting period at 61 per cent in Gaza and 26 per cent in the West Bank.⁹ Young women are particularly affected by youth unemployment, with an overall unemployment rate of 64.7 per cent, compared with 36.9 per cent of young men. In Gaza, the situation is particularly dire with unemployment rates of 86.3 per cent for young women and 51.8 per cent for young men.⁹ Discrimination within the workplace continued to persist, as evidenced through disparities in wages. The average daily wage for women represented 81.1 per cent of that for men in 2013,¹⁰ demonstrating an increase of the wage gap of 5.7 percentage points compared to 2012.

14. Concerns related to limited access to essential health care and shortages of drugs and medical disposables remain, with increased concerns in Gaza. The current crisis has left health-care centres damaged, without adequate medical equipment and stock, and health-care providers unable to properly attend to the needs of women and girls requiring sexual and reproductive health services. As a result of the destruction to homes and the shelter crisis, it is expected that about 3,000 displaced pregnant women will continue to suffer from lack of access to basic services and special dietary and vitamin supplements.⁴ During the crisis, more than 45,000 pregnant women were deprived of access to basic reproductive health services, and around 5,000 deliveries took place in extremely poor conditions.⁴

15. The water and energy situation remains critical. Gaza's only aquifer will become unusable as early as 2016, with the damage irreversible by 2020; 95 per cent of water from the aquifer is unfit for human consumption. For drinking, people either purchase desalinated water from tankers or depend on small

⁸ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza Initial Rapid Assessment" (27 August 2014).

⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014. Labour Force Survey: (April-June, 2014) Round (Q2/2014), *Press Report on the Labour Force Survey Results*, Ramallah-Palestine.

¹⁰ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. "Labour force survey annual report." (2013).

desalination units at home.¹¹ Prior to the conflict, the precarious energy supply only met approximately 46 per cent of the estimated demand. With the destruction of public infrastructure including the only power plant and water facilities during the recent conflict, the functioning of basic services, including water and sanitation were severely debilitated and present serious implications for the public health of the population, including women.

16. In terms of education, the situation showed mixed results. According to the latest data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics,¹² the adjusted net enrolment rate in primary education in Palestine was 92.74 per cent in 2012, with a gender parity index of 0.99. In the case of lower secondary education the enrolment rate was 83.6 per cent and the index 1.06 with girls slightly outnumbering boys. For upper secondary education the rate was 71.55 and the index 1.24 in favour of girls. Improvements in enrolment have, however, been coupled with an overall decline in the quantity and quality of education as a result of violence, the closure of Gaza and restrictions on movement. Additionally, the significant gains made by women in education over time have not been translated into progress in women's participation in the labour market. Continuous population growth and insufficient infrastructure stretched school capacities to its limits, negatively affecting the quality of education delivered. Prior to the crisis, Gaza faced a shortage of almost 200 schools and two-thirds of schools were operating on a double shift basis. The hostilities are expected to magnify the shortage of classrooms as roughly 258 schools (including at least 75 UNRWA schools) sustained damage and some schools are completely destroyed.⁴ In the West Bank, threat of harassment by Israeli settlers and Israeli security forces on the way to school and fear of harm and humiliation at checkpoints continue to create stress and fear among children and their families.

17. While women have continued to participate in a range of roles in the political realm, they remain underrepresented in formal decision-making bodies and processes. As at September 2014, women held 3 out of 17 ministerial level posts (16.6 per cent) in the new Palestinian Government of National Consensus — an increase from 12.5 per cent in the previous Government, but a drop from 21 per cent of the last Government of May 2012. In the justice sector, women only account for 15 per cent of judges, 16 per cent of prosecutors and 21 per cent of lawyers, with some drops registered from the previous year when figures were 15, 19.5 and 32.5 respectively. Women hold about 41 per cent of public sector employment and tend to remain at lower positions of decision-making.¹³

18. The occupied Palestinian territory continued to be characterized by a weak rule of law. Many barriers to women's access to justice, especially for women victims of violence, remain, hampering opportunities for women to seek redress.¹⁴ The existing legal frameworks contain laws that are outdated and discriminate against women, particularly in matters of divorce and child custody. Women and girl victims of violence continue to face a combination of challenges preventing them from accessing available security and justice services, ranging from difficult physical access to security and judicial institutions, in particular those residing in

¹¹ http://www.unicef.org/oPt/Outcome_document_on_Water_and_Energy_in_Gaza_-_16_May_2014.pdf.

¹² <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>.

¹³ Data from 2012 from the Palestinian General Personnel Council.

¹⁴ UN-Women, "Women's Access to Justice — Access Denied." (December, 2014).

Area C, to stigmatization of and pressures from families and communities on women who seek justice. Even in cases where women manage to access justice services, they often face service providers who lack professional knowledge in dealing specifically with women and girl victims of violence and who continue to interpret outdated laws pertaining to the Penal Code and personal status law in a way that infringes on women's rights.

19. The informal justice system continues to deal with matters traditionally considered private issues, including so-called honour crimes and domestic violence. According to the civil society partners, 19 cases of femicide were reported for the period of January to September 2014, compared to 28 cases for the whole year of 2013. However, the number of cases is most likely underreported. During the reporting period, no cases of so-called honour crimes were reported to OHCHR in Gaza. This is likely a result of the social and cultural context and a lack of willingness to report such incidents openly. According to OHCHR, new trends have emerged in femicide cases or the killing of women as a result of family disputes or crime. Studies suggest that overcrowding, especially owing to the housing situation in Gaza and East Jerusalem, exacerbates violence within households.¹⁵

20. The Palestinian Government continued to take noteworthy steps to strengthen capacity to prevent and respond to different forms of violence against women. In May 2014, the President issued a presidential decree that amended articles of the Penal Code by removing provisions for leniency with regard to murder in the name of so-called family honour. The Palestinian Cabinet approved the National Referral System for Women Victims of Violence (Takamol) in 2014. While the Family Protection from Violence law was provisionally accepted, it is still under discussion with regard to its legislative applicability with the Palestinian Basic Law. The Office of the Attorney-General appointed 15 trained prosecutors to investigate violence against women cases. Sustained efforts are, however, needed to improve and expand services and access to justice for all victims and survivors of gender-based violence and to review, revise and strengthen relevant laws.

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

21. The United Nations continued its efforts to respond to the range of development and humanitarian challenges. Priorities for the United Nations support to the Palestinian people are outlined in a set of key documents, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the State of Palestine 2014-2016, which is aligned with the Palestinian National Development Plan 2014-2016, and the 2014 Strategic Response Plan for the occupied Palestinian territory which outlines the humanitarian programming. This section updates on assistance provided by the United Nations system, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, donors and civil society, to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls in the following areas: education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development.

¹⁵ Norwegian Refugee Council, Overview of the Housing Situation in the Gaza Strip (March 2013), and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Easing the blockade: Assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip (March, 2011).

A. Education and training

22. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives to promote women's and girls' access to education and training and improve learning environments. In the 2013/14 academic school year 29,518 girls (59 per cent of all students) were enrolled in elementary and preparatory education in UNRWA schools in the West Bank and 111,825 girls in the Gaza Strip (48 per cent of all students); 630 female students were enrolled in technical and vocational training programmes (55 per cent of total) and 427 female students (63 per cent of total) were enrolled in a teacher training degree programme administered by UNRWA. In addition, UNRWA granted 36 scholarships to young refugees, of which 30 were granted to young women who excelled academically but would otherwise be unable to afford tertiary education in fields such as business administration, sciences, engineering finance and accounting. Through its Al-Fakhoora Dynamic Futures Programme in Gaza, UNDP provided academic scholarships for 324 students (180 female) and supported their economic empowerment opportunities in the form of paid internship to facilitate the transition to the labour market.

23. To promote access to quality education for all Palestinian children, nine United Nations organizations¹⁶ coordinated by UNESCO continued their support to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in piloting an educational package designed to improve capacities on early childhood development and promote inclusive and child-friendly education regardless of gender, disabilities, backgrounds and circumstances. A major achievement has been the opening of Grade 0 (one year of pre-school) classrooms in 30 public schools in the West Bank and 14 in Gaza aiming to improve the development and learning of more than 1,000 children (50 per cent girls). Forty-four Early Childhood Development teachers (all female) have been trained in these pilot schools, along with Grade 1 teachers to facilitate the transition to primary education. In addition, training and awareness sessions on inclusive education in Gaza reached 603 university students (369 female) and 825 teachers (518 female).

24. In the West Bank, UNICEF and partners supported safe access to schools, providing protective accompaniment to schoolchildren at 14 Israeli military checkpoints and gates for safer commutes to school. This has benefitted 3,568 children (29 per cent girls) and 304 teachers. In Gaza, UNICEF, with the Ministry of Education and partners, supported the reopening of schools to ensure that 230,000 schoolchildren (52 per cent girls) return to school after the hostilities, including support for the cleaning and disinfection of 27 Government schools that were used as collective shelters during the conflict, as well as training about 12,000 schoolteachers and administrators on psychosocial support, a policy of non-violence in schools and identification of traumatized children and referrals. Along with partners, UNICEF implemented after-school activities that benefitted 14,000 adolescents (50 per cent girls) with creative learning, life skills and recreational activities. The gender-sensitive after-school activities aimed to increase leadership skills and the participation of girls.

25. Food assistance continued to play an important role in improving learning environments. WFP reached 140,014 children (50 per cent girls) through its food assistance in schools in the West Bank and Gaza. UN-Women maintained the

¹⁶ FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNSCO, WFP and WHO.

“Women-Run School Canteens” programme in the West Bank providing access to healthy and nutritious food for 123,809 schoolchildren (50 per cent girls). Through extracurricular activities, the programme also raised awareness of schoolchildren, teachers, staff and parents on the effects of good nutrition on health.

26. UNESCO continued to support the training of 83 young female journalists on the use of social media and gender-sensitive reporting. In addition, specialized workshops were organized on women journalists’ rights, media ethics and the role of women journalists in promoting reconciliation. Psychosocial counselling is being provided to 30 female journalists from Gaza and the West Bank.

B. Health

27. The United Nations continued to build on good practice and results reported in the previous year to improve the access to and quality of health services, including maternal and reproductive health care. UNRWA remained a major provider of basic health-care services in the West Bank and Gaza, operating a range of care facilities, as well as mobile clinic teams and employing over 2,000 staff. From October 2013 to June 2014, UNRWA provided antenatal care to over 30,000 Palestine refugee women in the West Bank, which is more than double the number of women served last year. A total of 11,258 Palestine refugee women (68.6 per cent) were referred to secondary or tertiary care.

28. UNFPA continued to support a national programme of family planning and advanced the coverage of its services within Ministry of Health clinics and through civil society organizations. UNFPA also maintained support for a maternal mortality surveillance programme. In addition, UNFPA supported the integration of gender-based violence services into the national health system to detect, treat and refer survivors of gender-based violence and 1,200 health service providers were trained on gender-based violence response. During the hostilities in Gaza, UNFPA supported five maternities in Gaza with medical supplies and essential drugs and reached 4,000 displaced women with dignity kits, reproductive health services and psychosocial support. In addition, UNFPA reached 120,000 displaced young people with recreational activities and psychosocial support.

29. United Nations entities continued to provide a range of psychosocial services and support initiatives to improve the quality of mental health services. The UNRWA Emergency Community Mental Health Programme paid particular attention to Bedouin Palestine refugee children and women living in Area C and the Seam Zone in the provision of counselling and psychosocial support. During the reporting period, 2,735 women and girls (56 per cent) participated in psychosocial group activities. UNRWA also implemented community awareness and behavioural change programmes, including community-based family protection services integrated in the primary health-care centres, to address gender-based violence, child protection and sexual and reproductive health rights. Through the Family and Child Protection Programme, UNRWA aims to protect vulnerable groups in Palestine refugee camps, children, youth, women, the elderly and people with special needs from all forms of abuse, neglect and discrimination. Through WHO support, 117 mental health professionals (42 per cent female) received specialized training in child and adolescent mental health, family therapy that addressed gender-based violence, recovery, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

30. In response to the escalation of violence in Gaza, UNICEF provided drugs and medical consumable items for use in pediatric hospitals and primary health centres in the Gaza Strip benefiting at least 30,000 children (50 per cent girls). In addition, UNICEF-led awareness-raising activities on communicable diseases that reached 3,998 women (47 per cent of the total), 2,935 children (50 per cent girls). More than 23,475 lactating mothers in Gaza benefited from breastfeeding counselling, including 6,202 women during the conflict in Gaza.

C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods

31. Within its development programming, United Nations entities continued to prioritize initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and improve food security and livelihoods.

32. Microfinance support remained a source of short-term poverty alleviation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the UNRWA Microfinance Programme provided 2,776 loans to Palestinian refugee women (36 per cent of total loans) amounting to \$3 million (28 per cent of total loans). To promote the economic empowerment of women, UNRWA introduced a microfinance programme that targets women only with home-based income generating projects or activities.

33. UNDP, through its Productive Families and Economic Empowerment Programme, provided support to nearly 4,000 women entrepreneurs and female-headed households in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to secure sustainable income and employment. As a result, 37 per cent of the targeted beneficiary families were lifted out of poverty and 79 per cent improved their average monthly income by 64 per cent. Moreover, UNDP interventions contributed to creating more than 5,000 paid and sustainable new job opportunities for women leading to a substantive increase in family incomes. Female entrepreneurs and business owners' access to regional and international markets was improved. Through the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme, UNDP supported comprehensive training and grant schemes, including business development services, in support of the empowerment of poor households, including female-headed households. UNDP also supported the establishment of a national committee to review trade agreements and cooperation frameworks.

34. UNESCO and partners rehabilitated buildings in four Palestinian villages to be used as centres for women's associations. These centres will provide services for around 150 women. Through women's engagement in community activities, UNESCO raised awareness of cultural heritage preservation and its role as a tool for socioeconomic development mainly through cultural tourism. UN-Habitat implemented a housing and income-generating project for underprivileged women in Hebron city where 100 housing units were developed. A technical and vocational training centre for marginalized women has also been established where small-scale economic activities and cooperatives were initiated.

35. Various initiatives sought to build women's skills and capacity to produce and market various products. UN-Women provided training for a total of 70 women beneficiaries in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on designing and producing quality marketable Palestinian handicrafts and products. Additionally, two training manuals were developed; one on the marketing of women-produced cultural products and the other on gender-sensitive agro-biodiversity. Supported by FAO and

UNDP, the national first initiative, aimed to promote and market high quality cultural and agricultural products of 28 women's associations locally and globally.

36. UNCTAD implemented a project entitled "Capacity development for facilitating Palestinian trade", which aimed to increase the representation of women in the Palestinian Shipper's Council staff (three out of seven employees are women) and the Council Board of Directors (two out of 13 Board members are women) as part of capacity development initiatives for facilitating Palestinian trade. The project reached approximately 220 women. It also supported 173 women through workshops and trainings on the trade and supply chain management.

37. ILO continued to support the promotion and development of women-only cooperatives. Over the past two years, ILO has been providing technical support to the General Directorate of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Labour. More recently, ILO worked closely with the Directorate in identifying new non-traditional economic sectors for cooperative development for women and building the capacity of cooperative counsellors at the Ministry of Labour to provide better advisory services and counselling to women-only cooperatives.

38. UN-Women continued to strengthen sustainability and financial autonomy of community-based women centres and secure greater livelihood and economic security for women in marginalized communities through the Women-run School Canteen Programme, which is now well-established across all 13 governorates of the West Bank. As at September 2014, 53 community-based organizations were involved in the programme, of which 18 centres were making profits and had almost achieved financial independence. The programme created part-time employment opportunities and a secure monthly income for around 625 women.

39. FAO, WFP, UNDP and UNRWA continued interventions aimed at improving food security, with a particular focus on women. FAO aimed to increase income generation, stabilize agricultural capacities and improve food security for vulnerable households in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, providing agriculture inputs such as small animal husbandry to more than 1,160 women. WFP contributed to women's empowerment through its nutrition awareness activities in the Gaza Strip. The trainings, which reached 1,000 women, aim to raise awareness on the nutritional impacts of food and support women's key role in guaranteeing food security for the entire household and their role in the management of food resources and meal preparation. Strengthened informal women's networks were created as a by-product of the trainings supporting women's resilience by providing a peer support group beyond close relatives.

40. UNDP contributed to enhancing women's access to resources and food security through the development of irrigation systems and water resources in the West Bank; 2,820 women benefited from upgrades in the land irrigation network, which effectively resulted in a marked increase of cultivated land of water storage. UNRWA supported 2,761 refugee households that joined the UNRWA food voucher programme, of which 8,543 (49 per cent of the total) were female beneficiaries. UNRWA also supported the Cash-for-Work Programme, with 3,665 (48 per cent of total) female beneficiaries, and provided cash-for-work opportunities.

41. During the Gaza hostilities, UNRWA and WFP undertook an exceptional food distribution scheme, providing food assistance to families that usually do not

receive food assistance from WFP, reaching an estimated 620,000 beneficiaries, of which 305,014 were female.

D. Rule of law and violence against women

42. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives designed to improve women's access to justice and enhance the capacity of institutions and personnel to prevent and respond to violence against women. Priority for activities continued to be placed on supporting the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019).

43. The UNDP Access to Justice and Rule of Law Programme supported the establishment of gender units across the justice and security sectors and the promotion of gender-sensitive laws and policies. More specifically, as part of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, it developed the capacity of the Gender Legislative Committee to review and improve draft laws, bylaws and amendments from a gender perspective. Through Birzeit University, an accredited diploma programme was provided for senior Palestinian Civil Police on public administration and gender mainstreaming. It also supported the establishment of a security sector gender taskforce under the auspice of the Ministry of the Interior comprised of seven Palestinian security agencies, which adopted recommendations to institutionalize and mainstream a gender perspective into all policies, plans and programmes. The Security Sector Gender Task Force fed into the development of the Security Sector Strategic Plan (2014-2016), which presents concrete steps to strengthen and develop tools and policies to incorporate gender into the security establishment.

44. Through this programme, UNDP provided legal aid services, including legal representation, counselling and information, to almost 22,000 women in 2013, in particular with regard to family breakdown issues and disputes frequently linked to family violence, including applications by women for divorce, separation, custody, maintenance and, alimony and inheritance issues. UNDP also supported a study on public perceptions of family law reform in collaboration with the Birzeit University Institute of Women's Studies, to help inform future family law reform efforts. In Gaza, the Awn Network of civil society legal aid providers established a gender justice council to provide legal aid services to female inmates and to campaign on legal policy issues in support of women's human rights. One such successful campaign resulted in a decision of the de facto authorities to remove the stigmatized labelling of women as "divorcees" from identification cards. In the West Bank, support provided to the Palestinian Maintenance Fund to develop institutional relations with other government bodies enabled the Fund to increase its retrieval rate and provide reliable monthly alimony payments to more of the most marginalized women and children in the West Bank.

45. A number of United Nations entities supported activities aimed at raising the awareness of violence against women, as well as expanding support services. During the reporting period, 311 UNRWA staff members and nearly 1,000 community group members were trained on gender-based violence, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the West Bank. From October 2013 to June 2014, 166 (87 per cent women and girls) gender-based violence survivors were identified and accessed services, including counselling. In response to the

Gaza crisis, UNRWA focused its attention on the protection of women and girls in the context of the unprecedented number of internally displaced persons in its temporary shelters. This included providing 24-hour services for victims of any forms of violence, sensitizing shelter staff and organizing awareness-raising campaigns for men and women about the risks of sexual and gender-based violence, in addition to establishing multipurpose rooms designated for women and adolescent girls in shelters. In 2014, OHCHR carried out three seminars with local leaders focusing on women's human rights in three different locations of the Gaza Strip and urged them to uphold the rights of women in their communities. In May and June 2014 OHCHR, in collaboration with the Gaza Bar Association and the NGO partners, organized full-day workshops for Gaza lawyers on human rights principles, including sessions on gender-based violence.

46. Based on the results of the 2012 Gender Based Violence Survey,¹⁷ ILO has partnered with Birzeit University in the West Bank to promote a more gender-sensitive university environment. In June 2014, ILO conducted a training-of-trainers for the staff of the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University on the participatory gender audit methodology with the aim of increasing the role of the Institute in advocating for equal opportunities and treatment of women in the university while also developing capacities to identify and intervene on issues related to gender-based unfair treatment in the workplace.

47. UNFPA is currently supporting the establishment of a mechanism to collect data on gender-based violence, and the development of a national referral system to strengthen multisectoral services and support to gender-based violence survivors in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Palestinian Civil Police and the Ministry of Justice.

48. Through its Strengthening Women's Access to Justice Programme, UN-Women built the capacity of a core group of lawyers in the area of prosecution on violence against women. The Palestinian Attorney-General appointed 15 specialized lawyers (9 men and 6 women) to provide legal aid and representation to women victims of violence, in addition to the development of standard operating procedures for the prosecution of cases involving violence against women. UN-Women continued to provide technical support to the Palestinian Bar Association, where a specialized training on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and international standards of handling and litigating violence against women was organized for about 20 lawyers. The lawyers, through the Palestinian Bar Association, continued to legally support cases of violence against women for female inmates inside the correction and rehabilitation centres and sheltered women. Furthermore, UN-Women provided training for Palestinian Civil Police officers within the Family Protection Unit to build their capacity on standard operating procedures for responding to violence against women with a view to safeguarding rights and due process.

49. UNODC continued to support and strengthen the capacity of the Palestinian Ministries of Justice and the Interior and the Palestinian Civilian Police to manage, administer, deliver and expand forensic services in accordance with international standards, including with regard to the investigation of gender-based violence cases.

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, *Gender-based Violence in the Workplace: An overview from the occupied Palestinian territory*-Policy Brief (2012).

Seven Palestinian doctors, undergoing a four-year specialized training programme in forensic medicine in Amman, completed their first year of training. A “best practice” manual on sexual and gender-based violence examination for forensic practitioners and criminal justice system stakeholders was developed, together with a training programme in forensic nursing, and a forensic laboratory facility was established.

50. In the second half of 2014, UNDP and UN-Women commenced implementation of a new comprehensive joint rule of law, justice and security programme in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip seeking to systemize gender interventions across all rule of law components and develop dedicated and specialized gender capacities to deal with cases of violence against women.

E. Power and decision-making

51. During the reporting period, UN-Women supported the creation of a national women’s political participation caucus, which functions as an advocacy and lobbying body to support women’s political participation and access to decision-making spheres. The caucus group is comprised of 100 PLO political party representatives, women’s advocates, youth advocates and civil society organizations representatives in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The caucus members received trainings on gender concepts, the Palestinian women’s bill of rights, the personal status law, the Penal Code, the Labour Law, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Since its establishment,¹⁸ the caucus has conducted a review of political parties’ bylaws from a gender perspective. At the local level, UN-Women supported the creation of 10 committees in rural areas of the West Bank to advocate for the participation of women in political and public life. UN-Women also supported the establishment of the Constitution Shadow Committee, comprised of 24 young women and five young men seeking to influence the ongoing Palestinian constitution-making process in favour of a gender-sensitive Constitution.

52. UNDP continued to support the Palestinian Initiative for Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, which is designed to enhance the capacities of 50 young Palestinian female leaders across the occupied Palestinian territory, including strengthening their networks and lobbying skills for formulation of gender-responsive policies and regulations to increase women’s political participation and representation.

F. Institutional development

53. UN-Women continued to provide technical assistance and institutional support to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, including in the follow-up to the Cross Sectoral National Gender Strategy (2014-2016), which was endorsed by the Cabinet in April 2014, and in the review of the Palestinian National Development Plan 2014-2016 and related sectoral strategies, including the labour sector strategy the local governance sector strategy, and the education sector strategy (2014-2016), from a gender perspective. In partnership with ILO, UN-Women supported the National Committee for Women’s Employment in developing its 2015-2017 Action Plan,

¹⁸ Established in the last quarter of 2013.

which focuses on increasing women's participation in the labour force and protecting their rights, with a special focus on the agriculture and the information technology sectors. As part of its Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment programme, UN-Women laid the ground for developing the capacity of national stakeholders in gender responsive budgeting and gender responsive planning. Technical support to line ministries continued on gender responsive planning, with more than 91 Government officials members trained during the latest government planning cycle for 2014-2016. UN-Women also supported the development of the Gender Charter for the Local Aid Coordination Structure, with the aim of developing a common vision and values with respect to dealing with gender issues within the aid coordination structure. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, carried out a set of workshops to enhance the skills of relevant national staff on gender-related issues.

54. Following a series of consultations with its tripartite constituents in 2013, ILO developed a Decent Work Programme for the period 2013-2016 that addresses key deficits in the labour market and promotes workers' rights. The Programme supports entrepreneurship and skills development for male and female youth, as well as cooperatives' development. ILO also conducted a labour review that draws on the earlier gender legal review undertaken by the National Committee for Women's Employment, and a rapid assessment of the labour inspection system carried out previously by ILO. The findings of the review, including on barriers to women's participation in the labour market, were incorporated into a policy paper with clear recommendations including a maternity benefit in the social security law currently being developed and a provision in the Palestinian Labour Law for defining and preventing harassment in the workplace.

55. UNDP supported the Ministry of Social Affairs to integrate women's economic empowerment into the National Social Protection Strategy. The Palestine Trade Center, through UNDP support, integrated gender perspectives into its results-based management system, administrative and personnel manual, the financial manual and the newly developed Code of Ethics and launched a database on women-owned businesses.

56. During the reporting period, WHO conducted five capacity development workshops in the area of social determinants of health for 100 Ministry of Health mid-level managers from various regions in the West Bank, introducing concepts and methods for analysing and addressing social determinants of women's and men's health.

57. United Nations entities undertook various initiatives to assess and ensure that the different needs of women and girls are taken into account in humanitarian action. UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs organized workshops with women's organizations in Gaza to identify avenues and opportunities for their participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. The workshops brought the knowledge and experiences of women's organizations to address gaps in the humanitarian response in the 2015 cycle and beyond, notably, validating the analysis carried out by a Humanitarian Gender Adviser on gender-specific priorities to be reflected in the 2015 humanitarian appeals process. To inform the humanitarian response, UN-Women completed field research on the situation of women and girls in the Access Restricted Area in the Gaza Strip, analysing the impact of border conflict on women's and girls' protection, livelihood

and access to services within the framework of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

58. UNESCO, through the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre, supported the strengthening of capacities related to policy-oriented research on gender equality: 48 professionals (40 female and 8 male) from governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental research and gender departments have completed a 96-hour capacity development programme. UNESCO also organized additional training sessions on gender-sensitive planning for 22 members of the Gender Advisory Committee of the Palestinian Authority's Security Sector.

59. ESCWA is supporting the development of a national Gender Statistics Framework for Palestine with gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated indicators that will constitute a tool for policymakers to monitor progress against global and national commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

60. **The reporting period was marked by a series of alarming developments, including a steep escalation of tension and violence between Gaza and Israel and a suspension of the direct final status negotiations. The large military operation launched by the Israeli army from 8 July to 26 August 2014 in the Gaza Strip resulted in a humanitarian emergency with an unprecedented scale of destruction, devastation and displacement, which further heightened vulnerability and instability. Women, girls, boys and men are affected differently by the crisis and greater involvement of all groups in the design and planning of humanitarian recovery and relief programmes needs to be undertaken. It is essential to ensure women's participation across all programming. In addition, male and female youth, who constitute the majority of the Gaza population, need to be given a voice in identifying their particular needs and priorities within relief and recovery planning and implementation.**

61. **Many observations from previous reports still stand. Restrictions on movement and access, increased settlement expansion and settler violence, demolitions of Palestinian infrastructure and displacement, the fragmentation of the territory and the closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, continue to have a negative gender differentiated impact on the lives of Palestinian women and their families. The volatility of the context poses formidable obstacles to development in the State of Palestine. As the report shows, progress on development indicators remains fragile and prone to regression, including as it relates to women's rights. The significant operational challenges on the work on the United Nations and its partners pose serious barriers to addressing both immediate and longer-term needs.**

62. **High levels of unemployment and poverty persist, and many Palestinian women and girls still face significant obstacles in accessing basic services, health care, psychosocial support, water and sanitation, justice institutions and economic opportunities. Signs of increased food insecurity levels, compromised quality of educational environments and services and the growing challenges faced by women in the labour market are all issues demanding greater attention and a more gender-sensitive response in the coming year. The critical situations with regard to water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as energy, in**

particular in Gaza following the recent conflict, are other major concerns that must be addressed with urgency by all relevant stakeholders.

63. Despite stronger normative frameworks in place, violence against women remains a serious concern. Sustained efforts and investments are needed to improve and expand services and access to justice for victims. As noted in previous reports and as was evident during the reporting period, insecurity and poverty can exacerbate gender-based discrimination and abuse, including in the workplace, and lead to elevated levels of violence against women in both the public and private spheres. The prevention of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls must be at the forefront of efforts in the coming year.

64. Efforts made by the State of Palestine with the support of the United Nations to strengthen policy and implementation frameworks and build institutional capacity to address violence against women and promote gender equality and women's empowerment over the past two years are laudable. These include the development and endorsement of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019) and the Cross Sectoral National Gender Strategy (2014-2016), as well as the inclusion of commitments to gender equality in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Palestine and the new Palestinian National Development Plan. Strong political commitment at the highest levels and across line ministries, in addition to technical and financial support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and women's civil society organizations, will be required for their effective implementation. The accession to international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, brings new obligations requiring effective accountability and monitoring systems. The United Nations stands ready to assist in the implementation and monitoring of these obligations.

65. Progress has been made in improving systems for gender-sensitive data collection and analysis. Still, continued support is needed to further build capacity to collect and analyse sex- and age-disaggregated data on the full range of issues that have an impact on the lives of Palestinians. As stressed in previous reports, such analysis and data must form an integral part of all policymaking, planning and programming initiatives and inform reporting and briefings by the United Nations system to relevant intergovernmental bodies.

66. The United Nations will continue working towards the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The engagement of Palestinian and Israeli women in the peace process and talks must be supported in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2122 (2013) on women, peace and security. Building on promising initiatives under way that are supported by UN-Women, UNDP and others, stronger action is needed by all actors to increase women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making and to support women in elected and appointed posts. The good practice of direct dialogue between women's civil society organizations and senior representatives of the United Nations entities should be maintained.