

## The Impact of Current Situation on Women Protection in the Gaza Strip

### Background:

The humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip is sharply deteriorating; successive Israeli military attacks, 13 years of Israeli blockade and internal political division, poverty, unemployment, power shortages, poor drinking water, food insecurity, fuel shortages, weak infrastructure, delayed reconstruction processes, and the PA employees salary crisis/cuts; all these protracted crises overburdened with massive casualties from the ongoing “Great March of Return” demonstrations, resulting in a protection crisis and psychosocial stress contributed to erode coping mechanisms and resilience of Gazan. According to Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO 2019), 52000 people are in need of mental and psychosocial health as a result of Gaza ongoing tension.

These unrelenting intensity and duration of the extremely adverse conditions have affected the psychological well-being of the population in Gaza, however the impact on women are lager as they become more exposed to tension, depression and violence because they are considered the corner stone of the family and women often become shock-absorbers in the crisis. GCMHP<sup>1</sup> reported that there is an increase in the level of anticipatory anxiety, especially among women and children.

Women in Palestine face multiple layers of violence and discrimination, recent studies clearly show the **negative impact of the blockade** on women's conditions in the Gaza Strip. The blockade has resulted in severe restrictions on women's access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health, to realizing adequate living standards for themselves and their families, including shelter, water, electricity, and sanitation. Palestinian women are also subject to Israel's aggressive, and sometimes, lethal attacks against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Moreover, the protracted humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and its impact has exacerbated Gender-Based Violence (GBV)<sup>2</sup> in all its forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence and child marriage. UNFPA reported that more than 148,000 women are exposed to GBV in the Gaza Strip.<sup>3</sup> According to PCBS, in 2011 only 0.7% of GBV survivors seek help due to the lack of confidential and compassionate services, and fear of stigma and reprisal.

Women participated in the **Great March of Return** and were exposed to Israeli attacks. According to the latest report issued by the Ministry of Health 12 women were killed and 2,440 (7.5% of total injuries) were injured during the period March 2018 until mid-June 2019. The peaceful protests resulting in dozens of death and

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thousands of injuries causing lifetime disabilities and losing of head of the household.

Losing the primary breadwinner of the family forms substantial burden on the family and especially the woman whereas the mother is required to meet all the needs of her family, including financial needs. Also, the consequences are harsher on injured women particularly for mothers as they are expected to continue fulfilling their home duties despite the injury. Furthermore, mothers bear the responsibility towards injured children by virtue of their reproductive role and thus they become more tired and stressful due to the recession and help they provide besides basic functions at home, compounding the burden on women.<sup>4</sup>

## Key Barriers affecting Women NGOs:

**Occupation policies:** Israel exerts pressure on the civil society organizations. Israel has issued several laws that specifically targeted human rights groups and organizations that opposed the occupation. Israeli restrictive laws and policies affect Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations, especially those operate in East Jerusalem. Additionally, there are increased incitement campaigns against specific non-governmental organizations, especially human rights organizations, by senior Israeli politicians. The accusations against a number of non-governmental organizations that operated in Gaza Strip in 2016 put them under the risk of not receiving necessary humanitarian aid.

**Lacks of funds:** The deteriorating conditions in the Gaza Strip is exacerbated by significant shortfalls in donor support for the Palestinian Authority (PA), UNRWA, Non-Governmental Organizations and humanitarian operations in general, undermining the ability to effectively respond to increasing protection needs. Only 6 M\$ of protection projects were funded out of 35.9 M\$ required under the Humanitarian Response (16.7%).

**Non-Clarify of funding policy:** Burdensome funding requirements, procedures and conditional funding are compounding the difficulty of some women NGOs in accessing funds and are increasing their workload. The competition among donors to provide support according to their own priorities and policies is complicating the work of these NGOs.

The increased involvement of international NGOs in setting priorities and implementing programs threatens to marginalize Palestinian women NGOs in development work and confuses their priorities.

The short-term, project-based nature of funding to NGOs is creating job insecurity and is making it difficult for women organizations to maintain their professional staff.

**Internal political division and the absence of effective Governance system:**

Government restrictions and imposing unfair laws and regulations on women NGOs continue to curtail their effectiveness. There has also been increasing tendency of both governments, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to control NGOs and specifically women NGOs to undermine their role in society. The Palestinian Authority and the de-facto authority of Gaza issued new measures to the Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organizations of 2000 that have increased the administrative burden for the civil society organizations especially women organizations, requiring more steps in the registration process, complex financial procedures, administrative obstacles to open and validate bank account or receiving and transferring funds.

**Massive needs, scarce resources and low level of coordination:** The available resources are limited, the absence of a national plan to respond to emergencies and lack of coordination between organizations. In addition, the pace of events and the large number of people injured outstripped the capacity of organizations to respond to the needs of the participants, plus the lack of clarity of the role of civil society organizations among women beneficiaries and audience. Moreover, the multiplicity and diversity of providers and poor coordination among them negatively affected providing services.

**Unclear/scattered roles and responsibilities:** The lack of the real role of women's civil society organizations to address protection concerns and psychological support to women. Women organisation posses experience where they can contribute positively to lessen the impact of the acute needs. However, the lack of involvement and consultation with and among women organizations need to be addressed.

## Recommendations:

**We call upon the International community to:**

- Provide the emergency humanitarian assistance as soon as possible to ensure the provision of protection support to affected people especially women, and provide the necessary funding for the implementation of humanitarian and development programs to improve the protection of the Palestinians.
- Provide the required fund for protection interventions to contribute to ease the burden on women in order to reduce violence against women.

- Exert real pressure for ending the Israeli occupation and lift the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, and provide protection for the Palestinian citizen in the Gaza Strip.
- Not to undermine the role of Palestinian organizations and activists and support them to do their job, since they have a better understanding of their current reality. Additionally, the disagreements and division on the internal level should not be used as a pretext for not establishing partnerships related to the issues of women, peace and security.

### **We call upon The Palestinian Authority Organizations to:**

- Integrate the concepts of human rights inside the national legislations and in the adopted policies and procedures by incorporating the notions of Participation, Protection and Accountability in accordance with UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW.
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs must continue to support the requests of the women organizations and to support their efforts in implementing the strategic plan. Also, the ministry must nominate suitable women's rights activists to participate in international forums in order to highlight the issues of the peace and security of Palestinian women.
- Provide financial assistance to non-governmental organizations in the public budget to avoid lack of funding problems.

### **Other Recommendations:**

- Increase advocacy efforts on the impact of conflict on women: Advocacy efforts directed towards the Israeli authorities, in shadow reports and reports to Special Rapporteurs and to the international diplomatic community. It should highlight the impact of the Israeli military operations and the destruction of homes on women. Such efforts should call for accountability as well as an end to the blockade which has devastated livelihoods. Case studies collected by NGOs represent an effective way to highlight this impact and the need for accountability and lifting the blockade.
- Not to isolate women-related issues from the other issues of the Palestinian national struggle. Women and organizations working for women issues should focus on being more active in the media, introduce new ways of lobbying and advocacy in order to mobilize more supporters both locally and internationally.
- To become well-versed in the various levels of lobbying and advocacy, and to distribute roles between official parties represented by the Palestinian Ministry

of Women's Affairs and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) represented by women's rights and grassroots/community-based organizations.

- Formulate strategies for cooperation with international women's rights organizations which are active and influential in their respective donor countries, as well as developing advocacy mechanisms in order to support donor organizations in making funding and political decisions in international forums to the benefit of Palestinian women and the Palestinian society.
- Palestinian women's issues cannot be raised without the continuous struggle for the recognition of women's rights at the internal Palestinian level. Also, these organizations should promote the participation of women in negotiations and their contribution in ending the internal division.
- Gain more experience in documenting violations in accordance with international standards, and increase their credibility via international parties by adopting robust research and documentation methodologies, committing to the principle of objectivity, avoiding the politicization of human rights issues and refraining from the use of emotive language in the documentation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

<sup>2</sup> Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is any harmful act of sexual, physical, psychological, mental, and emotional abuse that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females. (OCHA)

<sup>3</sup> "The humanitarian impact of Gaza Electricity and Fuel Crisis on GBV", May 2017.

<sup>4</sup> WAC Study "Women and Great Return March", 2018.

<sup>5</sup> MIFTAH study "A Vision for Palestinian Women's Rights Organizations", 2017.

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