



THE 71ST SESSION OF MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST

FOURTH COMMITTEE ISSUES BOOK

1. Women in Peacekeeping
2. Assistance in Mine Action
3. Situation of Palestinian Women



The Main Committees of the UN General Assembly consider agenda items referred to them by the General Assembly and prepare recommendations and draft resolutions for submission to the General Assembly plenary. The Committees correspond with the General Assembly's major fields of responsibility.

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) considers a broad range of issues covering a cluster of five decolonization-related agenda items, the effects of atomic radiation, questions relating to information, a comprehensive review of the question of peacekeeping operations as well as a review of special political missions, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Israeli Practices and settlement activities affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories, and International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. In addition to these annual items, the Committee also considers the items on Assistance in mine action, and University for peace biennially and triennially respectively, both of which will be before it at the 76th session of the General Assembly. (UN HANDBOOK, 2017-18)

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WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING

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In post-war and post-colonial countries, the transition from conflict to peace can be fraught with political, social, and institutional obstacles. Opposing political factions, corruption in government, and fractured societal bonds can stymie the peace process and create a cycle of violence and conflict. To preserve peace and implement lasting democratic changes in recovering countries, the United Nations (UN) utilizes UN Peacekeeping, headed by the UN Department of Peace Operations and legitimized by the UN Charter. Member States, the General Assembly, the Security Council (UNSC), and the Secretariat work together to maintain international peace and security through the use of peacekeeping forces in countries facing significant reconstruction challenges. For 60 years, UN peacekeepers have supported countries seeking to reconstruct society and implement a permanent peace agreement and representative government. Through three guiding principles – consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate – UN Peacekeeping aims to facilitate the political process, protect citizens, reintegrate former combatants, promote human rights, and restore the rule of law.¹

The need for stable peace operations is not isolated to one continent or region. There are currently twelve active peacekeeping operations around the world: India and Pakistan, Cyprus, Golan, Lebanon, the Middle East, Kosovo, Western Sahara, Mali, the Republic of South Sudan, Abyei, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.² Each mission addresses a specific issue and carries out a mandate, established by the UNSC and often invoking Article VII of the UN Charter, to restore or maintain peace in the affected

¹ "What Is Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping>.

² "What Is Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

region(s). The scopes of peacekeeping operations are not isolated to traditionally patriarchal political institutions. Though a stable government is less likely to create conflict, protecting the vulnerable and rebuilding society is as important to UN Peacekeeping missions as safeguarding political processes. Often, obstacles that post-conflict areas face disproportionately affect women and children in society. Notably, two common symptoms of conflict— sexual violence and political repression— can create an environment in which the contribution of women to society is not only overlooked but also actively inhibited. Through peacekeeping missions, the UN strives to facilitate peace in host countries with democratic representation of society members, including women.

Women Peacekeepers

Addressing women's problems and upholding women's rights in areas of conflict are impossible without an impartial, gendered presence. UN Peacekeeping has proven effective in helping to protect women, particularly as more women participate in peacekeeping operations. In areas with established peacekeeping operations, the presence of UN peacekeepers leads to less sexual violence, while the increased presence of female peacekeepers tends to decrease sexual exploitation.³ UN Peacekeeping has also found that women peacekeepers are better able to access the population, specifically women and children, to gather critical information related to gender-based violence, and the UN asserts that recruiting and retaining female peacekeepers is an "operational imperative" to building peace and protecting rights.⁴

UN Peacekeeping has identified six primary benefits of women peacekeepers that identify the importance of female inclusion in peacekeeping missions:

- Improved operations and performance

³ Adam Twardowski, "The Future of Peacekeeping in Africa," Brookings, February 19, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-future-of-peacekeeping-in-africa/>.

⁴ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

- Better access to populations
- Reflecting the communities that peacekeepers serve
- Building trust and confidence
- Helping prevent and reduce conflict and confrontation
- Inspiring and creating role models⁵

Women in peacekeeping are able to access communities at a more personal level, increase diversity, create fresh solutions to conflicts, and inspire women in post-conflict areas to fight for women's rights.

International Framework

As the UN recognized the important contributions of women to building peaceful societies, it established an institutional framework to incorporate gendered perspectives in international security and peace discourse.⁶ In 2000, the UNSC passed a landmark resolution, S/RES/1325, addressing the role of women in armed conflict and peace processes. It committed to increasing gender perspectives in international conflict, UN peacekeeping missions, and peace agreements.⁷ Additional Security Council resolutions, including 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960, continued to highlight women as a central component of post-conflict reconstruction, both within UN Peacekeeping and the broader host society.⁸ All Member States were urged to participate in the systematic inclusion of female perspectives by increasing representation of women in all levels of national, regional, and international decision-making related to conflict.

⁵ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

⁶ Robert Egnell, "Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness: Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security," *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016): 73, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26470433>.

⁷ Security Council resolution 1325, S/RES/1325 (2000), available from [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)).

⁸ Robert Egnell, "Gender Perspectives," 73.

The systematic framework to increase women's participation in peacekeeping revealed twin internal and external goals in highlighting the experience of women. Internally, the UN strives for equal representation of women within UN peacekeeping by increasing the number of women in uniform; externally, the UN seeks to integrate a gender perspective into UN missions that promotes gender equality in the host state(s) of the peacekeeping mission.⁹ The UN's promotion of greater equality has a rippling effect on representation in state societies. For example, the presence of more female peacekeepers empowers local communities by providing role models to young women; female peacekeepers in post-conflict parts of the world inspire local women to fight for greater participation in the political process and for improved rights.¹⁰ Thus, UN Peacekeeping— with increased female participation— can achieve three goals: improving women's representation within the UN itself via Member State recruitment; improving the condition of women in the countries in which peacekeeping missions are located; and embedding societal and political equality in the peace agreements and lasting institutions in host countries. In tandem, these goals highlight the experience of women in countries around the world, from prosperous nations to nations emerging from conflict.

Targets to Increase Women in Peacekeeping

Pursuant to the goals and framework initially laid out in S/RES/1325 (2000), the UN has implemented programs and established goals to increase the number of women participating in, and benefitting from, peacekeeping. Notably, the Secretary General's Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) identifies Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) as one of the eight areas of improvement for UN Peacekeeping. Member States who signed A4P agreed to implement the WPS agenda. This has entailed ensuring participation of women in all stages of the peace

⁹ Sahana Dharmapuri, "Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping," report, *International Peace Institute*, 2013: 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09557.5>.

¹⁰ Robert Egnell, "Gender Perspectives," 78.

process, systematically integrating a gender perspective into peacekeeping, and increasing the number of women in all levels of peacekeeping operations.¹¹ Thus far, 152 Member States have signed A4P, with Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, South Africa, and the United Kingdom specifically championing the WPS agenda.¹²

The UN has additionally set specific target goals for inclusion of women in peacekeeping forces. The Global Effort, launched by the UN Police Division, set specific percentile goals for female participation in UN peacekeeping institutions: 15% serving in military contingents; 25% for military observers and staff officers; 20% for women serving in formed police units; and 30% for individual police officers.¹³ Per the Department of Peace Operations, Member States are also requested to nominate, at minimum, 20% women for individual police officer positions and 30% for justice and corrections personnel.¹⁴

Numerous Member States have implemented their own programs to meet the framework goals instituted by S/RES/1325 (2000). National Action Plans (NAPs) on women, peace, and security are a common national, regional, and local strategy to advance the participation of women in security discourse. As of October 2020, 88 countries had NAPs, and 16 countries have adopted 55 local action plans.¹⁵

The Future of Women in Peacekeeping

Vast improvements have been made in the number of women involved in peacekeeping operations. In 1993, women made up only 1% of deployed uniformed personnel; in 2020, women constituted 4.8% of military contingents, 10.9% of police units, and 34% of justice and

¹¹ "Secretary-General's Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/A4P/>.

¹² "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

¹³ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

¹⁴ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

¹⁵ "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security: What We Do," UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

corrections personnel provided by governments for UN peacekeeping missions.¹⁶ Currently, most Member States are meeting the targets set by the UN based on the number of contributing forces for each country. However, improvements are still needed. Only 6.6% of all uniformed military, police, and justice/corrections personnel in field missions are women, in spite of UN program goals and statements verifying the proven equality of competency between women and their male counterparts.¹⁷ Additionally, seven out of ten worldwide peace processes between 1993 and 2019 did not include women mediators or signatories.¹⁸ Countries that seem to have struggled the most with integrating women into political processes include Mali, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic – all post-conflict locations with current UN peacekeeping operations.

Despite the UN's advocacy for women's rights and the inclusion of women in negotiating peace settlements in post-conflict areas, the UN cannot force increased representation. Ultimately, the responsibility to recruit women into all areas of peacekeeping, to volunteer peacekeeping forces, and to deploy women in peacekeeping missions lies with individual Member States. Therefore, Member States must implement consistent and committed national strategies to recruit and maintain women in peacekeeping, improve the condition of women in post-conflict areas, and embrace the experience of women in conflict and peace.

¹⁶ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

¹⁷ "Women in Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping.

¹⁸ "Facts and Figures," UN Women.

Questions to Consider

1. What impact does peacekeeping have on societies, particularly women, in postcolonial regions around the world?
2. What unique contributions do women make towards maintaining and securing peace, protecting against human rights violations, and creating post-conflict societies?
3. What specific strategies can the UN and its Member States use to increase the presence of women in peacekeeping operations?
4. What is your country's political and cultural attitude toward peacekeeping forces and women in peacekeeping?
5. How has your country's policy on gender equality, specifically the presence of women in the armed forces, progressed since UNSC S/RES/1325?
6. Does your country contribute to UN peacekeeping operations? How has your country included women in peacekeeping efforts, and what has been the outcome of incorporating women in aspects of peacekeeping?

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"Women in Peacekeeping." United Nations Peacekeeping. Accessed August 3, 2021.

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

SITUATION OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN

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Palestinian women experience socioeconomic, political, and cultural circumstances that create very difficult living conditions. Over half a century of Israeli occupation has created insecurity and instability for the Palestinian population as a whole. The Israeli occupation's deep-rooted system of movement and access restrictions continues to interfere with the livelihood of Palestinians and prevent economic growth in the occupied Palestinian territory. A 2019 report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that the physical and administrative restrictions put in place by the occupying power have isolated Palestinian people from international markets and driven them into an overwhelming trade and economic dependence on Israel, ultimately contributing to a deteriorating Palestinian economy and rising poverty levels.⁴⁸ Unlawful Israeli practices such as the internal forced displacement of civilians and the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians persist, disrupting the unity and strength of the Palestinian population. Ongoing acts of violence, intimidation, and provocation by Israeli settlers and occupying forces against Palestinian civilians and properties were exemplified by events that triggered another explosion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in April 2021 (i.e. threats of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah and the police raid at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem). The recent flare-up of this conflict resulted in more than ten days of rocket fire and airstrike exchanges, disproportionately impacting Palestinians. A report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) revealed that the hostilities resulted in the death of 256 Palestinians and the injury of almost 2,000 more. In addition, the violent exchanges damaged 15,000 housing units, 58 education facilities, 28 hospitals and primary

⁴⁸ "Palestinian socioeconomic crisis now at breaking point." UNCTAD, UNCTAD, 10, Sept. 2019, <https://unctad.org/news/palestinian-socioeconomic-crisis-now-breaking-point>

healthcare centers, and multiple water and sanitation facilities and infrastructure within Palestine.⁴⁹

Palestinian culture, like many others around the world, is built upon a patriarchal structure that upholds a gendered social hierarchy and places women in a subordinate position to men. The power structure is preserved through the strict use of gender binaries and stereotypes. This patriarchal structure creates many of the disparities between the lives of men and women in Palestine. Patriarchal oppression and Israeli occupation go hand-in-hand in creating and perpetuating many of the difficulties that women face.

Security Concerns

The continued Israeli occupation of Palestine and various flare-ups of political unrest threaten the security of Palestinian women. In their disregard for the Fourth Geneva Convention,⁵⁰ the warring parties continue to put civilian women in harm's way. Of the Palestinians killed during the most recent escalation of violence that took place in April/May 2021, 40 were women. An additional 400 Palestinian women were injured during the hostilities, many of whom sustained severe injuries that could lead to long-term disabilities that would require rehabilitation.⁵¹ Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, stated in a June 24, 2021, briefing that "the cessation of hostilities reached last month between Israel and Hamas remains very fragile."⁵² With no sure sign of peace on the horizon, Palestinian women still remain at risk of being victimized by future rocket fire and airstrike attacks or other forms of violence.

⁴⁹ OCHA, Response to the Escalation in the OTP Situation Report No.1, (21-27 May 2021).

⁵⁰ GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR OF 12 AUGUST 1949, Geneva, 12 August 1949.

⁵¹ OCHA, Response to the Escalation in the OTP Situation Report No.1, (21-27 May 2021).

⁵² UNSCO, BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, REPORTING ON UNSCR 2334 (2016), (24 June 2021).

Amidst the ongoing conflict, Palestinian women are frequently subject to arrest and detainment due to the nature of their political activity. A 2021 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) found that during their reporting period, 133 Palestinian women were arrested by Israeli security forces and 31 women were detained by the Israel Prison Service on security-related charges. Many female Palestinian detainees have been subject to physical and psychological ill-treatment during interrogation and/or the investigation processes, including threats and intimidation, sleep deprivation, prolonged isolation from the outside world, being shackled into stress positions, and torture. Some detainees have also reported sexual harassment being used as a tool by Israeli authorities to apply pressure, especially during the interrogation sessions.⁵³ This has come in the form of gendered verbal and physical humiliation tactics. Some of these women are pregnant or have infants, but they are given no special regard by Israeli authorities and are generally forced to remain in unsuitable conditions, such as overcrowded cells with little access to outdoor spaces.⁵⁴ Beyond questions of the lawfulness of their arrests and detainments, Palestinian women endure physical and psychological harm at the hands of Israeli authorities. This kind of treatment is in violation of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).⁵⁵ In A/RES/75/98, the UN called for respect of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the Bangkok Rules, and condemned all acts of violence, especially any use of force by Israeli occupying forces, against Palestinian civilians that violate international law.⁵⁶

⁵³ UNOHCHR, Implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1, OHCHR, 46th Sess, UN Doc A/HRC/46/63 (2021).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ UN General Assembly, United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), 65th Sess, UN Doc A/RES/65/229 (21 December 2010).

⁵⁶ General Assembly resolution 75/98, Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, A/RES/75/98 (10 December 2020).

Palestinian women also face security threats from within their own communities and households. Results from a 2019 survey by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that 24% of currently married/ever married women in the West Bank and 38% of currently married/ever married women in Gaza had experienced domestic violence.⁵⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated their situation. Movement restrictions put in place following the outbreak of the infectious disease have increased the vulnerability of Palestinian women, especially those living in abusive households or relationships. Civil society and government service providers recorded a spike in cases of domestic violence in the months following the outbreak, reported through emergency hotlines that were expeditiously established to provide remote services. Femicides have also been a problem in Palestine. Often, these gender-based killings are done in the name of so-called “honor,” or for challenging or failing to adhere to prevailing patriarchal traditions and social norms. According to the Women’s Centre for Legal Assistance and Counselling, 35 instances of gender-related killings, suicides, and deaths in suspicious circumstances have taken place during its most recent recording period– a dramatic increase from the 22 cases that took place in the previous recording period.⁵⁸

Health Concerns

One of the many impacts of the Israeli occupation is the damage to Palestinians’ psychological health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in five people (22.1%) living in conflict and post-conflict settings has depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.⁵⁹ In addition to dealing with high rates of poverty, unemployment, inadequate water supply, food insecurity, and declining

⁵⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society. (2019). <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2480.pdf>

⁵⁸ UNHCR, Implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1, OHCHR, 46th Sess, UN Doc A/HRC/46/63 (2021).

⁵⁹ WHO, Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan, 73rd Sess, UN Doc A73/15 (2020).

education, health, and living standards, Palestinians confront many stressful and traumatizing situations that are more closely linked to the Israeli occupation. Experiencing and/or witnessing forced displacement, destruction of property, physical and verbal abuse, and the deaths of community members takes a toll on the mental health of Palestinians. The positions that Palestinian women take due to traditional gender norms, such as remaining in a domestic environment for longer periods throughout the day, can make them even more vulnerable to psychological harm. According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), forced evictions and home demolitions disproportionately affect Palestinian women, especially female heads of households. These events have a devastating effect on their psychological well-being.⁶⁰ Due to Palestine's gendered division of labor, women are expected to fulfill the role of primary caretaker of their families, caring for their children and tending to their emotional and mental health needs. This responsibility makes it even more difficult for Palestinian women to deal with the impacts of occupation. The recent addition of COVID-19 lockdowns has increased the insecurity and distress of Palestinian women, as they have been burdened with even more maternal tasks (e.g., homeschooling) while confined to their homes.⁶¹

Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank do not have access to adequate health care. Palestinian women in particular have struggled to obtain proper reproductive health care. Since Palestinian society is governed by patriarchy, tradition, and conservative norms, the issue of reproductive health does not get the support and attention it requires. Barriers to Palestinian women's access to reproductive health come in the form of strict laws and movement restrictions. For instance, under Article 8 of Palestinian Health Law No. 20, women in the West Bank and Gaza are prohibited from receiving an abortion by any means except when it is

⁶⁰ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, New York, 18 December 1979.

⁶¹ Ghandour, R., Ghanayem, R., Alkhanafsa, F., Alsharif, A., Asfour, H., Hoshiya, A., Masalmeh, A., Nadi, M., Othman, L., Ryahe, S., Wahdan, Y., Wahsh, S., Yamani, A., Giacaman, R. (2020). Double Burden of COVID-19 Pandemic and Military Occupation: Mental Health Among a Palestinian University Community in the West Bank. *Annals of Global Health*, 86(1), 131.

necessary to save the mother's life. Where it is permitted, both the woman and her husband must submit written approval of the operation.⁶² These conditions make it extremely difficult for Palestinian women to access abortions when faced with unwanted pregnancies.

According to the WHO, Israeli-enforced restrictions on movement throughout Palestine, including East Jerusalem, render particular risks for expectant mothers.⁶³ Palestinian women seeking postpartum and gynecological medical care are not able to move freely. These women are often held back by the numerous military checkpoints throughout the West Bank, as well as the blockade placed on Gaza that requires Palestinians to acquire special permits for passage. The most recent flare-up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has further complicated the situation; as of May 2021, the WHO reported at least 91 attacks against health care facilities located in Palestine, resulting in damaged emergency vehicles and the destruction of health clinics. There have also been reports of harassment, physical attacks, and restrictions on the movements of ambulances, paramedics, and healthcare workers. After days of closure in May 2021, only about 40% of Palestine's Ministry of Health (MOH) primary health clinics and 16 of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) 22 primary health clinics were able to re-open. Unfortunately, not all of those clinics provide reproductive and sexual health services.⁶⁴ In the wake of recent developments, there will be even more risks for Palestinian women, especially expectant mothers, seeking health care in Palestine.

The water, sanitation, and hygiene situation in Palestine remains critical for both men and women. Israeli practices and policies in the West Bank have served to help them seize and assert control over Palestinian water resources, leading to a water shortage. Occupation authorities engage in an unequal and discriminatory allocation of water resources in the West

⁶² Shahawy, Sarah. (2019). The Unique Landscape of Abortion Law and Access in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 21(2).

⁶³ United Nations, Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women- SecGen Report, (2013).

⁶⁴ UNFPA, Escalation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Israel- Situation Report No.1, (13 April- 20 May, 2021).

Bank. They have interfered with the construction and maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure by denying Palestinians the necessary permits to complete such tasks.

Checkpoints, roadblocks, and the construction of the Separation Wall in the West Bank have obstructed Palestinian access to water facilities, resources, and services. As a result of these actions, Palestinians living in the West Bank consume on average four to six times less water than Israeli citizens. In fact, Palestinians generally have access to and consume an amount of water that is far below the WHO recommendation of 100 litres per day. In East Jerusalem, housing permit barriers leave over half of the Palestinian population disconnected from the water network, and maintenance failures leave over one third of Palestinian households disconnected from the sewage network. As a result of coastal aquifer pollution caused by over-pumping and wastewater pollution, deliberate attacks on and the destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure, and the general underdevelopment of the water and sanitation sector, nearly all of the water that is available in Gaza falls short of WHO's water quality standards.⁶⁵

The May 2021 air strikes resulted in the destruction of a sewage system inside Gaza as well as a desalination plant providing fresh water to 250,000 people in Gaza going offline. These obstacles, compounded by an intermittent power supply, force so many Palestinians in Gaza to depend on private street vendors to restock their desalinated water supply; unfortunately, street vendors often charge high prices for their water.⁶⁶ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in collaboration with the government and NGOs to provide Palestinians with improved access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services and infrastructure. With European Union (EU) funding, UNICEF built Gaza's largest seawater desalination plant and its

⁶⁵ EWASH and Al-Haq, Israel's violations of human rights regarding water and sanitation in the OPT – Report by Al-Haq and EWASH to CESCR, (September 2011).

⁶⁶ "Water in Gaza: Scarce, polluted and mostly unfit for use." ReliefWeb, 17 August 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/water-gaza-scarce-polluted-and-mostly-unfit-use>

largest solar field. UNICEF continues to develop innovative solutions to make Palestine's water supply safer as well as more cost effective and sustainable.⁶⁷

In terms of susceptibility to infection, COVID-19 affects both men and women equally. OCHA's March 2021 COVID-19 Emergency Situation report for Palestine revealed that there have been 270,878 cumulative cases, 242,968 recoveries, and 2,881 fatalities since the pandemic began. In March 2021, active cases nearly doubled in Palestine, reaching 25,029, more than tripling in Gaza alone. Palestine is procuring COVID-19 vaccines primarily through the Gavi COVAX AMC Facility. The Israeli government has been administering vaccines to Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, as well as to Palestinians without Israeli residency who are employed in Israel or an Israeli settlement. As of March 2021, over 700,000 people in Palestine had received their first dose of the vaccination, and about 8,000 people had received both doses.⁶⁸ There have been no reports of gender discrimination in the administration of the vaccines. Nevertheless, OCHA reports that the West Bank healthcare system is struggling to deal with the recent rise in hospital admissions and patients requiring ventilators.⁶⁹ Capacity and supply struggles in Gaza have been further complicated by the recent hostilities between Israel and Palestine, including an Israeli airstrike that damaged the only laboratory in Gaza that processes COVID-19 test results, making it temporarily inoperable.

Labor Force

The Palestinian labor force has been characterized by high unemployment, limited job creation, and limited prospects for growth. While these problems affect the Palestinian population as a whole, the situation of Palestinian women in the labor force is generally worse than that of their male counterparts. Despite increasing levels of education among Palestinian

⁶⁷ "WASH: water, sanitation and hygiene," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/sop/what-we-do/wash-water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

⁶⁸ OCHA, Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt): COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report No. 29, (March 2021).

⁶⁹ Ibid

women, and though more women are seeking employment, the proportion of women who are employed has not seen substantial improvement since 1999. Palestinian women still have one of the lowest female labor force participation rates in the world, at around 22% among working age women in comparison to 72% among working age men. In 2018, the unemployment rate for Palestinian women was double that of Palestinian men, 51% to 25%.⁷⁰ Disproportionate unemployment rates impact female laborers at every skill level.

The patriarchal structure and traditional gender norms of Palestinian society have great influence over the composition of the labor market. Palestinian women are often pushed into the informal economy, doing domestic work and a broad range of cleaning jobs, and working unpaid family jobs, such as those in the agricultural sector. Over 29% of women in the labor force are unpaid family members compared to 7% of men. Palestinian women are limited to employment in select industries, such as health care and education. They are also less likely to run their own businesses; 23.4% of men in the labor force are self-employed/employers, compared to 12.8% of women. In addition, Palestinian women are subject to harassment in the workplace but lack access to complaint mechanisms. They are less present in workers' unions, less aware of their rights under Palestinian Labor Law, and often lack control over revenues they have generated.⁷¹

Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 covers important details about gender discrimination and the entitlements of women in the work force, but specific articles that relate to monitoring and oversight are not clearly articulated and do not include provisions ensuring gender discrimination does not occur in the workplace. Because of this deficiency, gender discrimination is still ongoing in workplaces throughout Palestine. In Law No. 7, women are granted the right to paid maternity leave if they have worked for a period of 180 days at an

⁷⁰ Hammoudeh, Weeam. "Gender Wage Gap and Female Labor Force Participation in the Palestinian Labor Market." Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), 2020, <https://www.mas.ps/files/server/20201902145714-1.pdf>

⁷¹ United Nations, Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women- SecGen Report, (2013).

institution. Despite this, maternity leave benefits are not universally available to women in the labor force; about 70.6% of postsecondary educated women have maternity leave benefits while only about 24.3% of women with less than a postsecondary education have them. Law No. 7 doesn't explicitly mention wage discrimination, but in forbidding discrimination between men and women, it can be assumed that equal pay and entitlements, in addition to special accommodations for childbearing and family care, would be a guarantee. However, equal wages for men and women are not a reality. In 2017, men earned an average of 103.3 ILS per day while women earned only 88.2 ILS per day. The disparities in the earnings affect men and women from all educational backgrounds and across all occupational sectors. Palestinian women working in the private sector are also far more likely to earn below minimum wage than Palestinian men, with an even larger gap in the informal sector. Since the gender wage gap goes unexplained, it is probable that gender discrimination is responsible for it.⁷²

UN Women and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are collaborating on a joint program to address the problems of inequality that women face in accessing decent work. It is titled "Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine." That program will provide support for Palestinian women in gaining opportunities for better jobs, more security at the workplace, social protection for their families, equal access to professional development, and better chances for personal development and integration into society.

Political Representation

In 2014, Palestine acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), without reservations or declarations. By these standards, Palestinian women should not be subject to any kind of exclusion, restrictions, or

⁷² Hammoudeh, Weeam. "Gender Wage Gap and Female Labor Force Participation in the Palestinian Labor Market." Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), 2020, <https://www.mas.ps/files/server/20201902145714-1.pdf>

distinctions based on gender that would impair their opportunity to engage in politics. On January 12, 2021, President Mahmoud Abbas approved an amendment to the Palestinian General Election Law that increased the minimum quota for women's participation in local council and Legislative Council elections from 20% to 26%. The Palestinian Legislative Council has succeeded in reaching the 20% quota since 2006. This past April, Palestine's Central Elections Commission announced that 405 of the 1,391 candidates who were legally approved to run for the Palestinian legislative elections were women. This makes the potential representation for women in the Legislative Council 29%, exceeding the new quota by three percentage points.⁷³ While these developments show improvement in their representation, women continue to struggle to gain access to decision-making positions, and the gender disparity remains large. In the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), only one out of the fifteen Executive Council members is female. Of the sixteen Governorates of Palestine, only two are female. As of April 2019, only three out of the twenty-two cabinet members were female.⁷⁴ Palestinian women have almost never been directly involved in peace talks between Israel and Palestine. Without their presence at the table during these discussions of peace, Palestinian women's voices and ideas cannot be heard, and the outcomes cannot be truly equitable.

Conclusion

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, an unprecedented international testament to the unique reality that women face in areas of conflict throughout the world.⁷⁵ This document acknowledges how women are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict and affirms that efforts to prevent violent conflict, deliver recovery and relief, and forge lasting peace are more sustainable when women are present and equally involved. The UN

⁷³ Nofal, Aziza. "Palestinian women still underrepresented on electoral lists." Al-Monitor, 20 April 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/palestinian-women-still-underrepresented-electoral-lists>

⁷⁴ Shahwan, Najla M. "The ongoing struggle of Palestinian women." Daily Sabah, 20 March 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/the-ongoing-struggle-of-palestinian-women>

⁷⁵ Security Council resolution 1325, Resolution 1325 (2000), UN Doc S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000).

recognizes the importance of using a gendered lens when examining areas of conflict, as the experiences between genders vary greatly. Palestinian women living amidst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have a unique experience that must be recognized.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your country have a position on these issues?
2. Has your country participated in providing humanitarian aid to Palestine in light of the COVID-19 crisis and/or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
3. What might be effective measures to ensure equal political representation for Palestinian and other women?
4. How might an improved response to COVID-19 lead to improved living conditions for Palestinian and other women?
5. How might the world, in particular the UN, better respond to violations of human rights in regions, such as the Middle East, experiencing conflict?

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