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**Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls  
(July 2016 – June 2018)****Summary**

At its fifth meeting held in Beirut on 18 and 19 December 2018, the Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) requested that the ESCWA secretariat “continue preparing the periodic report on the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and highlight the impact of occupation” on them.

The present document, extracted from the report for the period July 2016 – June 2018, reviews the situation of Palestinian women and girls focusing on political, social, economic, human rights and security developments in the context of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. The Committee on Women is invited to take note of the contents of the present document and provide comments thereon.

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## Introduction

1. The present document, extracted from a recurrent publication by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the same subject,<sup>1</sup> reviews the situation of Palestinian women and girls during the period July 2016 – June 2018, focusing on important political, social, economic, human rights and security developments. It describes the volatile political setting in the occupied Palestinian territory and its impact on the well-being and rights of women and girls, highlighting the devastating effects of the blockade of Gaza.

2. The present document highlights the increasing gap in living standards between the West Bank and Gaza, where the blockade, combined with periodic escalations of violence and long-standing political divide, has led to deterioration in the living conditions for women and girls. During the reporting period, the health rights of women and girls continued to be undermined by the blockade of Gaza and by discriminatory travel permit policies. Additional discriminatory permit policies impact the right to build and are implemented in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Despite several measures put in place by the Palestinian Government, violence against women and girls continued, posing a significant challenge to the attainment of their economic, social, civil and political rights. The State of Palestine has made some progress in aligning national legislation and policies with the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and has also launched the [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for the State of Palestine \(2017-2019\)](#).

### I. THE POLITICAL SETTING AND GENDERED ASPECTS OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY UNDER OCCUPATION

3. During the period July 2016 – June 2018, the prolonged Israeli occupation, punctuated by frequent incidences of violence and violations of international law, continued to adversely affect advances in Palestinian women’s political, civil, social and economic rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

#### A. POLITICAL CONTEXT

4. The Government of Israel continued its policies of land appropriation and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the reporting period, in clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). In February 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General reiterated that ongoing settlement construction and expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under United Nations resolutions and international law and issued a rebuke.<sup>2</sup>

5. Since 2007, Israel has imposed a restrictive blockade on Gaza, trapping nearly two million residents and denying them access to the outside world. This has resulted in high poverty and unemployment rates, in addition to substandard and dangerous living conditions. The United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territory projects that Gaza will become “unliveable” by 2020.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. SECURITY SITUATION

6. The security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to deteriorate during the reporting period. Conflict-related violence, including Israeli military operations, search and arrest campaigns, excessive use of force by Israeli security and military forces against Palestinian protestors, and intimidation and attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank prevailed, with a different impact on women, men, girls and boys. After a

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<sup>1</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2019/TP.2](#).

<sup>2</sup> [SG/SM/18882-GA/PAL/1403](#).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territory, *Gaza Ten Years Later* (Ramallah, 2017), p. 3.

three-year decline, Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, including women and girls, has been on the rise since the beginning of 2017.<sup>4</sup>

7. On 30 March 2018, Palestinian refugees who demanded their right to return to their homes and land, and an end to the blockade, launched a series of mass protests known as “The Great March of Return”, along Israel’s border fence with Gaza. Israel responded with an excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate amount of force, including use of live ammunition, which led to a high number of casualties and fatalities among unarmed Palestinian demonstrators.<sup>5</sup>

## II. LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

### A. MOVEMENT AND ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

8. During the reporting period, in the West Bank, the daily lives of many Palestinian women and girls continued to be marked by movement and access restrictions. In East Jerusalem, a key driver of women’s vulnerability has been the wall. Its deviation from the 1949 Armistice Line has resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites being “walled out” from the city. Although households in “walled out” communities of East Jerusalem have retained their permanent residency status and continue to pay municipal taxes, their access to health, education, and municipal services has become even more restricted. In Gaza, the blockade has trapped all residents.

### B. RESIDENCY AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION

9. Women’s right to family life and protection of the family unit continued to be undermined during the reporting period. In 2016, the residency status of 95 Palestinians in Jerusalem, including 41 women and 11 children, was revoked.<sup>6</sup> In June 2017, the Knesset renewed the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order – 2003), which prohibits Palestinians married to citizens of Israel or permanent residents of East Jerusalem from acquiring citizenship or residency status.<sup>7</sup>

### C. HOME DEMOLITION AND FORCIBLE TRANSFER

10. The confiscation of land for settlement construction and discriminatory planning and zoning policies has made it all but impossible for Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to secure building permits. These policies of the Government of Israel, in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, are the primary triggers for the forced displacement of Palestinians. Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and Bedouin and herding communities in Area C are the most vulnerable. In East Jerusalem, from January 2016 to 30 June 2018, 172 housing units without permits were demolished, affecting 503 people. During the same period, 122 non-residential structures in East Jerusalem, including a mosque, businesses and farming buildings, were demolished.<sup>8</sup> The policy of punitive home demolitions continued throughout the reporting period, leaving 95 persons homeless.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian bulletin: occupied Palestinian territory, May 2018, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> [A/ES-10/L.23](#).

<sup>6</sup> Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), “[East Jerusalem: facts and figures 2017](#)”, 21 May, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hamoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual, “[HaMoked to the HCJ: the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law has been extended automatically again, without any change or effort to limit the scope of harm to the Palestinian population living in the country for years; the Law’s broad repercussions must be reviewed anew](#)”, 15 June 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Based on data from B’Tselem, available at [https://www.btselem.org/planning\\_and\\_building/east\\_jerusalem\\_statistics](https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building/east_jerusalem_statistics) (accessed on 7 February 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

#### D. NIGHT RAIDS

11. From January to September 2017 alone, Israeli military operations in West Bank refugee camps were recorded on average 14 times per week, totaling 581 raids.<sup>10</sup> Military incursions in refugee camps are accompanied by constant and unpredictable use of tear gas with a devastating effect on the mental and physical health of residents – especially pregnant women.

#### E. ARRESTS, DETENTION AND POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT

12. The mass arrests of Palestinian men increase women's responsibilities to their families. For some households, it may increase their economic vulnerability and even lead to impoverishment, given women's limited access to economic opportunities. For others, it may lead to improvements in gender relations and status as women assume greater roles of authority in the household in the absence of men. As of June 2018, 5,900 Palestinian prisoners were held in Israeli prisons, including 60 women and girls.<sup>11</sup>

### III. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS AMONG PALESTINIAN WOMEN

13. Demographic and socioeconomic indicators throughout the reporting period highlight that entrenched gender discrimination and inequalities persist and continue to hinder Palestinian women and girls' enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

#### A. FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY

14. During the reporting period, women tended to experience higher economic vulnerability due to their limited integration in the job market and restricted access to productive assets and land, exacerbated by discriminatory inheritance laws. According to the World Food Programme, the prevalence of food insecurity among households headed by women was 15 percentage points higher than that among households headed by men – 36 versus 21 per cent.<sup>12</sup> Poverty rates between female and male-headed households were relatively similar in 2017: 30.6 per cent and 29.2 per cent respectively.<sup>13</sup> However, female-headed households remained among one of the highest recipients of public assistance in both Gaza and the West Bank. Thus, it is likely that without such social protection and assistance, a greater number of female-headed households would fall deeper into poverty.

#### B. EDUCATION AND LITERACY

15. Gender parity in education has been achieved, with a higher number of females enrolled in basic, secondary and higher education than males. During the reporting period, the educational attendance rate of girls was consistently higher than that of boys across all age groups.

#### C. EMPLOYMENT

16. Despite high educational attainment rates, women's access to employment has remained restricted and their participation in the labour force has remained among the lowest in the world. In the second quarter of 2018, most women (79.4 per cent) were outside of the labour force, meaning that they were not seeking or

<sup>10</sup> OCHA, [2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview - occupied Palestinian territory](#), November 2017, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Based on data from Addameer: Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, available at [http://www.addameer.org/statistics?field\\_date\\_of\\_statistics\\_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=06%2F01%2F2018&field\\_date\\_of\\_statistics\\_value\\_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=06%2F30%2F2018](http://www.addameer.org/statistics?field_date_of_statistics_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=06%2F01%2F2018&field_date_of_statistics_value_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=06%2F30%2F2018) (accessed on 7 February 2019).

<sup>12</sup> [WFP/EB.2/2017/7-A/4](#).

<sup>13</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), "[Poverty profile in Palestine, 2017](#)", p. 4.

engaged in employment.<sup>14</sup> Female labour force participation rates were especially low in East Jerusalem: in 2017, only 6.7 per cent of women were in the labour force, compared with 56.4 per cent of men.<sup>15</sup>

#### D. HEALTH

17. In the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza and the “walled out” communities of East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank, women’s right to health continued to be undermined mainly by the restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of people and goods, including patients, medical personnel and supplies. These occupation policies continued to adversely affect the social determinants of health and have negatively impacted health outcomes.

#### E. ENVIRONMENT, WATER AND SANITATION

18. During the reporting period, Gaza continued to face immense challenges related to the environment, water and sanitation, with an adverse impact on the well-being and the fulfillment of rights of women and girls, including the right to safe drinking water.

#### F. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

19. Palestinian women and girls continued to suffer from a double burden of violence stemming from the Israeli occupation and from within their own communities. Occupation-related violence and the patriarchal structure of Palestinian society rendered women vulnerable to different forms of violence in both public and private spheres. Within their own communities, Palestinian women and girls continued to be at risk of all forms of violence, notably domestic violence, sexual harassment, so-called honor killings and physical, psychological and verbal abuse, denial of resources, and forced and child marriage.

#### G. MEDIA

20. During the reporting period, women continue to be vastly under-represented in Palestinian media content. Palestinian media tended to represent women’s personal experiences of human rights violations, whereas men were represented as experts and official speakers. Furthermore, when Palestinian media granted attention to women, it was in favor of “women who work[ed] in elite and professional positions, instead of the most vulnerable women, such as rural women, women in refugee camps and women in Bedouin villages”.<sup>16</sup>

#### H. THE GIRL CHILD

21. Legislative frameworks governing child marriage remained fragmented and inconsistent. Several factors have contributed to the persistence of child marriage in the occupied Palestinian territory: high poverty rates; a lack of legislation explicitly prohibiting such unions; and a coercive environment emanating from occupation-related policies and practices.

### **IV. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN**

#### A. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND PROCESS

22. During the reporting period, women remained underrepresented at all levels in decision-making bodies, including the cabinet, municipal councils, camp committees, diplomatic corps, the judiciary and the police.

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<sup>14</sup> PCBS, “Press release on the results of the labor force survey second quarter (April-June, 2018) round”, n.d.

<sup>15</sup> PCBS, *Labor Force Survey – Revised Annual Report: 2017* (April 2018), p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> CEDAW/C/PSE/1, para. 78.

As of June 2018, women held 3 out of 19 ministerial positions. Following the municipal elections in 2017, the election of women to local councils stood at 21 per cent. Young women made up only 12.4 per cent of Student Council members in universities in the West Bank.<sup>17</sup>

#### B. ALIGNING NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

23. During the report period, the [National Policy Agenda \(2017-2022\): Putting Citizens First](#) was adopted. Gender equality figures prominently in the Agenda through a call to mainstream gender in public policies, legislative reforms, planning and budgeting; creating job opportunities for women, especially young graduates; ensuring women's fair access to judicial services; and combating discrimination and violence against women and girls while promoting their engagement in all aspects of public life.

24. The State of Palestine's accession to CEDAW is seen as an important opportunity for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls. While Israel is responsible for application of CEDAW to the occupied Palestinian territory, the State of Palestine is also responsible for the Convention's application as it seeks to build a more gender equitable State. During the reporting period, the State of Palestine submitted its initial report on the implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, reaffirming "its commitment to taking all measures necessary to prohibit such [gender] discrimination in all its forms".<sup>18</sup>

25. Commitment to engage women at all levels of peace building and security efforts has been demonstrated by the launching of the [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for the State of Palestine \(2017-2019\)](#).

#### C. NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERY AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

26. The Ministry of Women's Affairs sets and develops the gender strategies and plans of the Palestinian Government, based on the principles set forth under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other relevant international instruments, and works to combat violence against women as per the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women (2011-2019). It is the head of the Higher National Committee for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and it has also developed a national action plan together with women's rights organizations. During the reporting period, the Ministry launched the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy (2017-2022) as an integral part of the National Policy Agenda, which was prepared on the basis of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). ESCWA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) are also collaborating with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to estimate the cost of marital violence therein.

#### D. CIVIL SOCIETY

27. During the reporting period, Palestinian civil society organizations continued to play a crucial role in advocating for the advancement of the rights of women and girls. Leading Palestinian human rights and women's rights organizations drafted shadow reports for the CEDAW Committee respectively on the Government of Israel and the State of Palestine's implementation of CEDAW.

#### V. CONCLUSION

28. The present document highlighted the dire situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the devastating impact of the 12-year Israeli blockade on Gaza and the ensuing humanitarian disaster, and stunted development in the West Bank, especially in Area C and East Jerusalem,

<sup>17</sup> PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics* (Ramallah, 2017), pp. 53, 54, 56, 57, and 62.

<sup>18</sup> [CEDAW/C/PSE/1](#), para. 6.

affecting health, livelihood and economic prospects. Israeli occupation policies render the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, difficult in the occupied Palestinian territory, despite the positive steps taken by the Palestinian Government to amend legislation, combat violence against women and address the women, peace and security agenda.

29. All internal and external stakeholders must collaborate to improve the socioeconomic situation of Palestinian women and girls. The international community must hold Israel to account for breaches in international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It should also support the State of Palestine in its endeavours to address its humanitarian and development needs, particularly those of women and girls. In turn, the Palestinian Government should continue the important work that it has begun on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, in the framework of CEDAW and of the 2030 Agenda, in order to respond to the socioeconomic needs of Palestinian women and girls.

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