



PERMANENT  
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UNITED NATIONS

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**Statement by Ms. Nadya Rasheed, First Secretary, before the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fiftieth Session, 2 March 2006: (Please Check Against Delivery)**

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations for the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Commission and to express our congratulations as well as to the Bureau. We are confident that, under your able stewardship, the Commission will successfully address and conclude its program of work.

I would also like to extend thanks to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his report (E/CN.6/2006/6) concerning the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, submitted under agenda item 3: *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century."* I would also like to express our gratitude to ESCWA and to all the entities of the United Nations system for their invaluable efforts in providing much-needed assistance to Palestinian women.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Madame Chairperson,

In 2003, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was created to set policies and to ensure the mainstreaming of women's rights in all Palestinian Authority institutions. Since then, it has worked tirelessly to address all types of violence against women as a crosscutting issue in all of its programs. As a result, Palestinian women have been able to heighten their involvement in the political arena, which is evidenced by the increased number of women elected both in the national and municipal levels. However, as noted by the report by the Secretary-General mentioned above, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has the potential to improve the situation of Palestinian women and to promote and protect women's rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory but only if it receives the necessary resources and support.

However, all the resources and support can not overcome the permanent state of insecurity, tension and fear that Palestinian women and their families have continued to live in during Israel's 38-year occupation. Moreover, over the past five years, the suffering of Palestinian women has exponentially multiplied due to the intensification of Israel's illegal policies and practices, which has caused a dramatic deterioration of the economic, social and human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Indeed, Palestinian women have borne the brunt of the suffering, compounding the pressures and constraints to which Palestinian women are subject to in the traditional Palestinian patriarchal society.

P R E S S P R E L E A S E

Madame Chairperson,

Palestinian women fall victim to multiple forms of discrimination and violence. They are victimized by the brutality of the Israeli occupying forces, living in perpetual fear for their safety and that of their families. They are then forced to bear the additional burden of the worsening political, social and human rights conditions. In particular, the rampant unemployment and poverty exacerbated by Israeli actions, such as the restrictions on movement and the destruction of homes and agricultural property for the building of illegal Israeli settlements and its construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, has heavily impacted Palestinian women. This disabling environment has increased Palestinian women's sense of isolation, pushing them further into despair.

In addition to the significant roles that they traditionally play in the family, Palestinian women have been forced to assume a number of non-traditional responsibilities. With tighter restrictions of movement of men, many women are forced out of their protected domestic world to seek employment in order to sustain their families, while their unemployed fathers, brothers, husbands and sons are in effect removed from the work force. Even more tragic, over the past five years, many women have faced the heartbreaking reality of one of their male family members being killed at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces, forcing them to face these burdens and responsibilities alone.

Palestinian women's lives and safety are not only exposed to difficult conditions in their family lives but also in their most routine day-to-day activities. They confront frequent attacks by illegal Israeli settlers on roads between towns and villages. And sexual harassment by illegal settlers and soldiers has become a regular, daily experience for Palestinian women and girls at one of the over 500 military checkpoints throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Hundreds of women have been killed on their way to work and school, and many female students have had to drop out of high school and college due to the difficulties of traveling between towns and villages. And, unfortunately, the number of Palestinian women injured, imprisoned, arbitrarily detained and traumatized continues to rise unabated.

Madame Chairperson,

The restriction of movement of Palestinian people and goods, including the imposition of checkpoints, has indisputably crippled the Palestinian economy, transforming villages and towns into isolated prisons. Such restrictions have not only held the Palestinian civilian population as captives, but have also led to the needless deaths of Palestinian women and children on far too many occasions. I would like to highlight one particularly horrifying effect of these restrictions on Palestinian women: Pregnant women being forced to give birth at military checkpoints.

In a recent report released in August 2005, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the inhumane practice by the Israeli occupying forces of forcing pregnant Palestinian women to give birth at military checkpoints. According to the report, between September 2000 and December 2004, 61 Palestinian women gave birth at checkpoints, and 36 infants died as a result of the occupying Power's prohibition of ambulance access. In one of the many documented tragic examples, a woman was forced to give birth at a checkpoint in the West bank town of Nablus, leaving the father no choice but to use a stone to cut the umbilical cord. According to the Palestinian mother's testimony, "*I was left no other choice but to give birth on the dirt ground, in the dust, like an animal.*" The infant girl died before they were ever able to reach proper medical care.

There can be no justification, including that of security, for such inhumane and cruel acts. These repressive and dehumanizing measures, which have been imposed on the Palestinian people, are in blatant contravention of international humanitarian law as embodied in the Fourth Geneva Convention and The Hague Regulations, which are applicable to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including east Jerusalem, and which are obligatory to Israel, as the occupying Power.

Madame Chairperson,

My delegation wishes to emphasize not only the necessity of continued assistance to Palestinian women, but as the Secretary-General noted in his report, an intensification of assistance by the international community. Indeed, it has been such assistance by the United Nations, its agencies, international humanitarian organizations and the donor community that have helped to prevent the complete collapse of the socioeconomic situation of the Palestinian people under this brutal occupation.

The situation of Palestinian women does not allow us to standby idly until a resolution to the conflict is realized, but instead demands that we take immediate and concrete action. We must move beyond simply reporting, and move to restore basic human rights and human dignity to the Palestinian people. Despite all of the hardships the Palestinian people have faced, they continue to be steadfast in their legitimate struggle for the full realization of their inalienable rights and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Only then will we be able to genuinely speak of real progress and true advancement for not only the women of Palestine, but for all of its people and its future generations.

Thank You Madame Chairperson.