



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



# Solidarity with Palestinian Women and Girls A Call to Action

Beirut, 26 November 2021

## Background

As the Palestinian people endeavour to attain their basic human rights, including the right to self-determination, they continue to suffer from cumulative, multi-layered and inter-generational harms caused by occupation and stemming from policies that aim to control the land and dominate the population. This has led to the deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory, the de-development of economic and social sectors and asymmetric economic dependency on Israel.

Palestinians struggle daily to withstand the resulting conditions, confronting severe water shortages, increased food insecurity, limited employment and economic opportunities, the loss of property and resources, curbs on movement and other devastating effects. This impact is ultimately gendered, entailing disproportionate, specific and unique harms to Palestinian women and girls. As a result of such measures, women and girls continue to suffer from violence, including settler attacks and harassment that further constrain their ability to move freely. In turn, this limits their access to the public sphere, including access to education, access to employment and access to basic services, such as lifesaving reproductive health care.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continue to suffer from a 15-year blockade compounded by recurrent military offensives and operations, and the dire living conditions for the Strip's more than two million inhabitants are a humanitarian crisis. Around 80 per cent of Gaza's residents depend on international assistance while 62 per cent are food insecure; more than half live under the poverty line. The overall unemployment rate is 45 per cent, and for women it is 60 per cent. The health sector remains on the verge of collapse, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Gaza Strip was subject to yet another military offensive from 10 to 21 May 2021. The intolerable loss of life, substantial injury and mass displacement and destruction have exacerbated the already precarious situation, with women and girls facing increased gender-based violence, limited economic opportunities and limited access to essential services.

Over the past two decades, Israeli-imposed restrictions and the resulting humanitarian crises have necessitated the diversion of scarce national and international resources from development to immediate relief. Despite all the constraints and challenges, Palestinians and their institutions continue to exert efforts to attain sustainable development. However, current trends indicate that the attainment of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 on gender equality, will be out of reach if there are no drastic positive changes on the ground.

## Call to action

The conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to deteriorate at the same time as international solidarity with the Palestinian people grows. The responsibility of the international community towards the Palestinian people, especially women and girls, is clear. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine call for translating this responsibility and solidarity into action.

All relevant actors and stakeholders, including Palestinian institutions, the United Nations system, Member States and international and regional organizations are thus urged to take action to support the Palestinian people and their institutions in realizing sustainable development from a gendered lens in the occupied Palestinian territory as a prerequisite for justice, security and a lasting peace.

### *Mandates and framework*

This Call to Action is grounded in various documents, conventions, treaties and resolutions, including the following:

- The Charter of the United Nations, particularly the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination and the principle of equality and non-discrimination.
- International human rights law, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- International humanitarian law, namely the Geneva Conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), and its additional protocols.
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002).
- United Nations Security Council resolutions relevant to the Question of Palestine as well as resolution 1325 (2000) and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.
- Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council that are relevant to the Question of Palestine.
- The agenda of women, safety and peace, and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 1325.
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- The United Nations Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights (2020).

## Guiding principles

Based on the mandates and framework outlined above, this Call to Action is guided by the following principles:

- Adherence to international law is imperative to securing justice and peace for all those living in the region.
- Utilizing gender-sensitive rights-based approaches, grounded in international law and human right, through assistance and support frameworks with the active engagement of Palestinian women and girls in all processes.
- The individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people are inalienable and safeguarded by international principles and laws.
- Self-determination of the Palestinian people cannot be attained without the full engagement and realization of the rights of Palestinian women and girls through engagement in the implementation of the agenda of women, safety and peace and its accompanying decisions, and leveraging their results.

## Actions

- (a) Supporting the attainment of sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5, by providing all forms of support for Palestinian women and girls, including funding, technical assistance and capacity-building;
- (b) Empowerment of Palestinian women economically and politically, and enhancing their engagement in the public and private sectors;
- (c) Protecting women and girls from all forms of violence at home, in public places, workplaces, schools and universities;
- (d) Engaging with and supporting Palestinian institutions on the formation and implementation of policies and legislation that promote gender equality and equal rights for women, including repealing discriminatory laws and enacting positive laws, eliminating violence against women and girls in all spheres, ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights and guaranteeing women's equal representation and participation in all spheres;
- (e) Ensuring that agendas for protection addresses systemic and inter-related forms of discrimination against women and girls, while also creating adequate protection approaches for women's human rights defenders;
- (f) Applying a gender lens to all activities and interventions of development and humanitarian actors, including engagement with member States and internal decision-making;
- (g) Ensuring that development and recovery strategies, plans and interventions address the specific needs of Palestinian women and girls;
- (h) Ensuring that analysis on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and policy and operational responses integrate a gender analysis and prioritize the full and meaningful participation of women in all areas, including in development, humanitarian and peace processes;
- (i) Consulting regularly with Palestinian women's formal and civic organizations to discuss trends, challenges and potential solutions at the field level, including in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (j) Mobilizing additional funding for Palestinian women's institutions and organizations, including identifying financing opportunities for women's organizations along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus;
- (k) Taking immediate steps to assess and update emergency plans to address gaps, including those that unraveled during the May 2021 offensive, related to gender sensitive approaches and responses.

Implementation of all or any parts of this Call to Action will be most effective if done through multi-stakeholder coordination in partnership with Palestinian institutions, particularly the Ministry of Women's Affairs and women's civil society organizations. This necessitates a participatory approach that involves organizing, coordination and support.

Through its mandate as a regional commission, ESCWA is well positioned to facilitate, coordinate and support regional and international efforts proposed within this Call to Action to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, especially SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women.