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## Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**

## Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/13, highlights the situation of Palestinian women for the period from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015 and provides an overview of the assistance provided by the entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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\* E/CN.6/2016/1.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2015/13 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed grave concern about the increased difficulties being faced by Palestinian women and girls living under Israeli occupation and about the critical socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women ([E/CN.6/2015/5](#)), and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixtieth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from the United Nations entities and individual experts that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the State of Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

3. Unless indicated otherwise, the report is based on contributions and information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women. The present report includes contributions from the following United Nations entities: ESCWA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It complements other reports on the living and socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian people (see [A/70/76-E/2015/57](#), [A/70/354-S/2015/677](#), [A/70/82-E/2015/13](#) and [A/70/13](#)), as well as the report of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1 ([A/HRC/29/52](#)).

## II. Situation of Palestinian women

4. The reporting period began shortly after an open-ended ceasefire was agreed on 26 August 2014 between Israel and Palestinian militant groups, ending the 51-day conflict in Gaza, which had left an unprecedented level of destruction and

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the report of the Secretary-General on the status of Palestine in the United Nations dated 8 March 2013 ([A/67/738](#)), the designation "State of Palestine" is now used in all documents of the United Nations, notwithstanding the use in parallel of the term used in previous reports, "Occupied Palestinian Territory".

despair in the Gaza Strip and exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation. At the donor conference held on 12 October 2014, in Cairo, the international community pledged \$3.5 billion for the reconstruction needs of Gaza. As at 31 August 2015, only 35 per cent of pledges targeting the reconstruction needs of Gaza had been fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

5. The United Nations brokered an agreement between the Government of Israel and the Government of Palestine to facilitate the entry of dual-use material, such as aggregate, steel bar and cement, into Gaza for the reconstruction of housing, water networks and schools, among other major infrastructure projects. The temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has, to date, enabled over 96,000 families to procure construction materials for repairing their homes. In addition, almost 2,300 families of the 19,000 whose homes had been severely or completely destroyed have been cleared to purchase material through the mechanism.<sup>3</sup> However, the scale of reconstruction remains far short of satisfying the tremendous need in Gaza.

6. Challenges remain with respect to the two-State solution and meaningful negotiations. Nevertheless, over the last three months of the reporting period, the Middle East Quartet envoys (representing the European Union, the United Nations, the Russian Federation and the United States of America) have held active and direct consultations with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and key international partners on how to preserve the two-State solution and whether conditions can be established for the parties to return to meaningful negotiations.

7. The eight-year long closure of the Gaza Strip has had a devastating effect on Palestinians living in Gaza. Challenges affecting women, in particular, include the prevalence of gender-based violence and limited access to water, housing, land and property, employment opportunities, higher education and health care, including prenatal and neonatal health care.<sup>4</sup> Psychosocial distress levels, which were already high among the Gaza population, have worsened significantly as a result of the conflict and will require specialized support, specifically for children, adolescent girls and women.

8. Refugee camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are among the most densely populated urban environments in the world and the conditions in these camps have deteriorated over decades, in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Specifically for women and girls, this overcrowding limits their mobility, privacy and access to recreational spaces. Overcrowded living conditions and a lack of privacy cause psychological distress among camp residents and strain family and social relations. Residents frequently note that gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is a manifestation of such stress, combined with the strain caused by the unstable political and security situation and discriminatory gender stereotypes and norms.<sup>4</sup>

9. The Israeli Government has come under increasing pressure from settler groups to resume the planning and tendering of settlements, which have been in a

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank, "Reconstructing Gaza: Donor Pledges" (September 2015), available at: [www.worldbank.org/en/programs/rebuilding-gaza-donor-pledges#1](http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/rebuilding-gaza-donor-pledges#1).

<sup>3</sup> Data available at: <http://grm.report/#/>.

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA and The Culture and Free Thought Association, "Protection in the Windward: Conditions and Rights of Internally Displaced Girls and Women during the Latest Israeli Military Operation on the Gaza Strip" (October 2014).

lull since the fall of 2014. In July 2015, following the demolition of two buildings in the settlement of Beit El, the Government announced the construction of 300 new residential units there, as well as around 500 more in East Jerusalem settlements. In addition, a spike in demolitions of Palestinian villages in Area C of the West Bank<sup>5</sup> was recorded in August. The Israeli authorities continued to promote plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities in Area C, which if implemented, may result in their forcible transfer.

10. The reporting period was marked by lower levels of violence than the previous period, resulting in fewer civilian deaths and injuries, although there was an increase in casualties among Israeli civilians. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in the West Bank, between October 2014 and September 2015, 31 Palestinians (23 men, 1 woman and 7 boys) were killed and 3,248 Palestinians (2,544 men, 64 women, 621 boys and 19 girls) were injured by the Israel Defense Forces, while four Palestinians (two men, one woman and one child) were killed and 98 Palestinians (65 men, 9 women, 17 boys and 7 girls) were injured by Israeli settlers. Eight Israelis (four men, two women, one boy and one girl), mostly settlers, were killed by Palestinians, and another 127 Israelis (97 men, 17 women, 8 boys and 5 girls) were injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Another five Israeli men and two Palestinian men were also killed in one incident in West Jerusalem. In the Gaza Strip, four Palestinians were killed (three men and one boy), and 96 Palestinians were injured (80 men and 16 boys).<sup>6</sup>

11. During the reporting period, there was a decline in the total registered number of search operations, fatalities, injuries and arrests and detentions in the refugee camps in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Boys and young men are more likely than women and girls to be subject to violence during operations of the Israeli security forces, as well as during arrest and detention.<sup>7</sup> However, women in detention face gender-specific challenges, including inadequate access to medical care, risks associated with pregnancy and giving birth in prison, and sexual harassment. After their release from detention, women are particularly vulnerable to stigma and marginalization from their communities.<sup>8</sup>

12. Between October 2014 and July 2015, UNRWA provided emergency support to 766 families in the West Bank whose homes had been demolished or damaged by the Israeli security forces in the context of law enforcement and search operations.<sup>9</sup> Of the families affected, 214 (34 per cent) were female-headed households. With regard to the demolition of homes, of the 41 families that had their homes

<sup>5</sup> Following the 1993 Oslo Accords and the 1995 interim Agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the West Bank was divided into three zones, Areas A, B and C. Extensive responsibility was delegated by Israel to the Palestinian Authority in Areas A and B. Area C remained under full authority of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Protection of Civilians database of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

<sup>7</sup> There were 499 search operations during the reporting period, compared to 680 search operations in the previous reporting period; 7 fatalities in the reporting period compared to 15 fatalities in the previous; 288 injuries in the reporting period compared to 716 in the previous; and 479 detentions in the reporting period compared to 560 in the previous. Input from the West Bank Field Office of UNRWA to the present report.

<sup>8</sup> UN-Women, "Access Denied: Palestinian Women's Access to Justice in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Where are women? Where is women's accessibility to "justice"? Are there possibilities for justice in the context of military occupation?" (UN-Women office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Input from the West Bank Field Office of UNRWA to the present report.

demolished, 13 were female-headed households. Of those 41 affected families, 12 women were referred to the women's programme run by UNRWA and 23 women were referred to the mental health support programme.

13. Several factors continue to present significant barriers to freedom of movement and access to livelihoods for Palestinians, with differing impacts on women and men: the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the closure of the Gaza Strip and the differential status that applies to Palestinian women and men in different areas. The population of 1.8 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip remains effectively isolated from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by the continuing closure of Gaza by Israel. In addition, access to East Jerusalem remains limited for Palestinian residents from the remainder of the West Bank. Physical and administrative restrictions continue to impede humanitarian access to some of the most vulnerable communities in Area C, particularly those in the firing zones and those located behind the separation barrier. However, regulations for the movement of Palestinians from the West Bank to Israel were relaxed during the reporting period, and the number of permits issued for Palestinians employed in Israel reached 60,150.<sup>10</sup>

14. According to data collected by UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it is estimated that around 700 women were widowed as a result of the conflict in Gaza in 2014. Female-headed households in Gaza face particular challenges in accessing humanitarian assistance and inherited assets, owing to social restrictions. As primary caregivers, they also disproportionately experience the long-term impact of damaged infrastructure and reduced services, including on health-care, education and social protection services. The traditional division of roles between women and men in Gaza renders many newly widowed women unprepared to deal with challenges outside the home. Due to the lack of economic opportunities for women, few widows are able to provide for their families when the male head-of-household dies. Widowed women are frequently incorporated, along with their children, into the households of their parents or in-laws. In both cases, male kin and in-laws can block their direct access to benefits or entitlements, and women have no guarantees for control over any benefits or entitlements they receive.

15. The Palestinian labour force grew by 8.6 per cent in 2014, to reach over 1.25 million.<sup>11</sup> Although the female labour force participation rate grew from 17.3 per cent in 2013 to 19.4 per cent in 2014, it remains extremely low by both global and regional standards. The gender gap in labour force participation is significant, at 71.5 per cent for men, compared to 19.4 per cent for women. The most common areas for women's employment are the services sector (where 57 per cent of working women are employed) and "unskilled" agriculture work (20 per cent of working women),<sup>12</sup> both of which are highly susceptible to outside economic pressures. In addition, there is a gender gap in the median daily wage in the West

<sup>10</sup> Information provided by the Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories", appendix, para. 33 (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., para. 35. The remainder of women are employed in commerce, restaurants and hotels (10.3 per cent of women); manufacturing, mining and quarrying (9.8 per cent of women); transport, storage and communication (1.3 per cent of women); and construction (0.7 per cent of women).

Bank and Gaza Strip; in 2014, women's median daily wage was only 76 per cent that of men.<sup>13</sup>

16. Access to essential health care remains limited, and shortages of drugs and medical disposables are frequent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The recent conflict in and continued closure of Gaza has left health-care centres damaged, without adequate medical equipment and stock. In particular, the conflict in Gaza in 2014 resulted in a serious deterioration of family planning services, which has affected the health-care system's capacity to provide women with safe and reliable reproductive health services.<sup>14</sup> According to UNFPA, the maternal mortality ratio for 2014 for the State of Palestine was 30.97 per 100,000 live births, but UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have warned that this ratio is now at risk of increase owing to the inaccessibility of reproductive health care in Gaza.<sup>14</sup>

17. Access to safe, sufficient and affordable water also continues to pose a challenge for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, which affects women and girls in particular. In Gaza, the damage to water and wastewater networks caused by the conflict in 2014 has further exacerbated the situation. The unreliability and shortage of electricity and fuel further hamper the pumping and distribution of water to the population, as electricity is essential for the functioning of water pumps that extract and distribute water to households. Over 70 per cent of households in Gaza receive between 6 and 8 hours of piped water once every 2 to 4 days, and large areas of Gaza experience 12 to 16 hours of electricity blackouts every day.<sup>14</sup> In the West Bank, even though 96 per cent of the total Palestinian population is connected to water networks, reliability and quality remain serious issues of concern.<sup>15</sup> According to UNICEF, Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank are the worst affected by water scarcity, where roughly half the population is estimated to be without a water network connection, and the Palestinian Government has limited ability to provide access to water.

18. Limited household access to water and electricity has significant implications for women's and girls' burden of care, health, time spent collecting resources and ability to generate income in Gaza and the West Bank, given the strict division of labour between women and men within households. Water and sanitation issues also affect girls' enrolment and protection needs in schools. Prior to the 2014 conflict, a total of 300,000 students throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory had poor water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at school. Assessments conducted after the conflict indicated that at least 189 public schools were damaged, 26 of which were seriously damaged, and 83 out of 155 UNRWA school buildings incurred damage, although 90 per cent of those schools were repaired by the end of the reporting period.

19. The net enrolment rate for pre-primary education in the State of Palestine in 2013 was 40.6, with a gender parity index of 0.99. The adjusted net enrolment rate for primary education in the same year was 92.36, with a gender parity index of 1.01. In secondary education, the net enrolment rate was 80.35, with a gender

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<sup>13</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, press release dated 5 March 2015, available from [http://pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/WomenDy2015E.pdf](http://pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/WomenDy2015E.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Needs of women and girls in humanitarian action in Gaza — Gender alert for the 2016 response plan" (August 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Palestinian Water Authority, "Annual Water Status Report" (2014).

parity index of 1.09.<sup>16</sup> High rates of educational enrolment do not necessarily mean high completion rates, nor do they capture concerns about the quality of education. Boys are more likely to drop out at both the secondary and tertiary levels; nevertheless, girls' higher educational achievements have not translated into improved employment experience.

20. While women have continued to participate in a range of roles in the political realm, they remain underrepresented in formal decision-making bodies and processes. As of September 2015, women held 3 of 17 ministerial level posts (16.6 per cent) in the new Palestinian Government of national consensus, the same number and percentage as in the previous reporting period. During the reporting period, the Palestinian Central Council of the Palestinian Liberation Organization announced that it would adopt a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in State of Palestine institutions, in response to advocacy and lobbying by the General Union of Palestinian Women.

21. In June 2015, the Ministry of Women's Affairs produced a national strategy on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, with support from UNFPA and UN-Women. The strategy has a particular focus on preventing and protecting women from violations of their human rights in relation to domestic, workplace and community-based violence, and improving gender equality and women's participation in education, the labour market and decision-making.

22. The rule of law remains a significant issue across the State of Palestine. Palestinian women face specific challenges in accessing justice as a result of laws that discriminate on the basis of sex (notably in respect to inheritance and other personal status issues); women's limited knowledge of their rights and procedures; economic dependency; and social pressures and stigma.<sup>8</sup> Even in cases where women manage to access justice services, they often face service providers who lack professional knowledge in dealing specifically with women and girl victims of violence, and who continue to interpret outdated laws pertaining to the Penal Code and personal status law in ways that infringe on women's human rights. The result is a high level of underreporting of gender-based violence and attrition of those cases that are brought forward. Further, when women access the justice system and obtain judgements in their favour, a lack of enforcement means that justice remains out of reach.

23. Gender-based violence continues to be a key protection concern for women in the State of Palestine, and the situation is particularly acute in the Gaza Strip. A 2011 survey showed that 51 per cent of women in Gaza had been victims of gender-based violence.<sup>17</sup> A rapid assessment by UNFPA conducted after the 2014 conflict revealed that the protracted crisis and related displacement, lack of privacy and lack of basic services had exacerbated people's sense of vulnerability, leading to violence against women.<sup>18</sup> Case studies as part of a 2015 situation analysis by UNFPA

<sup>16</sup> Data available from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>.

<sup>17</sup> For the State of Palestine, 37 per cent of women had been victims of gender-based violence. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, survey on violence in Palestinian society (2011).

<sup>18</sup> UNFPA, WHO and the Palestinian Ministry of Health, "Victims in the shadows: Gaza post-crisis reproductive health assessment" (October 2014); UNFPA and The Culture and Free Thought Association, "Protection in the Windward: Conditions and Rights of Internally Displaced Girls and Women during the Latest Israeli Military Operation on the Gaza Strip" (October 2014), p. 9.

indicate that economic hardship, following the 2014 conflict in Gaza, has driven families to marry off their daughters early in order to improve the economic situation of the family. The rate of child marriage is higher in Gaza than in the West Bank; 28.6 per cent of women in the Gaza Strip aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18, compared to 21.4 per cent in the West Bank.<sup>19</sup>

### **III. Assistance to Palestinian women**

24. An update on assistance provided by the United Nations system, coordinated by the United Nations country team, in cooperation with the State of Palestine, donors and civil society, to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls in the following areas: education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development, is given in paragraphs 29-65 below. United Nations support to the Palestinian people is guided by key documents, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the State of Palestine 2014-2016 (aligned with the Palestinian National Development Plan 2014-2016), and the 2015 strategic response plan for humanitarian programming. The information presented below is based on the contributions from United Nations entities to the present report, compiled by the United Nations country team.

#### **A. Education and training**

25. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives to promote women's and girls' access to education and training and improve learning environments. During the academic year 2014-2015, UNRWA ran 252 schools in Gaza and 97 in the West Bank, with 290,977 pupils enrolled as at October 2014, of whom 53.4 per cent were girls. Gender equality and a quality education for boys and girls are at the centre of education reform by UNRWA, and special attention has been given, at UNRWA schools, to increasing awareness of gender-based violence. In addition to basic education, UNRWA provides technical and vocational education training. During the reporting period, 1,695 students, of whom 35.3 per cent were female, participated in such trainings. The Ramallah Women's Training Centre, with support from UNRWA, offers a co-educational technical vocational programme and female-only trade courses.

26. In order to ensure safer commutes to and from school, UNICEF and civil society partners provided protective accompaniment to schoolchildren at 14 military checkpoints and gates in the West Bank. This benefited 1,461 girls and 2,873 boys, as well as 333 teachers, 80 per cent of whom were women, throughout the 2014-2015 school year.

27. UNESCO continued to support the training of 265 young women journalists on gender-sensitive reporting, as well as with psychosocial counselling workshops and specialized training on social media.

28. Through the use of the participatory gender audit methodology developed by ILO, the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University has carried out a series of

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<sup>19</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF and UNFPA, "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014: Key Findings" (December 2014).



assessments, followed by awareness-raising initiatives among university students and staff, with the aim of introducing more gender-sensitive policies and procedures and creating an educational environment free from gender-based violence. In order to further promote gender equality, ILO provided technical support to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for conducting a survey on pay equity that focuses on discrimination patterns in the education sector in the West Bank and Gaza.

## **B. Health**

29. The United Nations continued its efforts to build on good practice and results reported in the previous reporting period so as to improve the access to and quality of health-care services, including maternal and reproductive health care. UNRWA remained the major provider of basic health-care services for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, operating a range of care facilities and mobile clinic teams. The total number of medical consultations between October 2014 and September 2015 stood at 4,055,248 in Gaza, where 60 per cent of the patients were female, and 1,304,219 in the West Bank, where 59 per cent were female. Maternal and child health continues to be an essential element of UNRWA assistance. As part of that effort, there is a need to raise awareness of the importance of engaging men in the family planning process.

30. UNICEF has also continued to support the Ministry of Health and partners to provide lifesaving postnatal care. A total of 32 per cent of women with high-risk pregnancies in Gaza (5,500 women) benefited from postnatal home visits by skilled midwives and nurses in the first half of 2015. In addition, 26,000 women were counselled on nutrition and breastfeeding practices, and four hospitals and one maternity home in the West Bank were certified as “baby friendly”. With more than 100,000 people still displaced in Gaza, UNFPA supported mobile clinic services, reaching 7,000 displaced women with reproductive health-care services and education. Similar outreach activities provide for isolated West Bank communities in locations affected by the separation barrier and settler violence. UNFPA has also partnered with the Ministry of Health to empower midwives through specialized courses on delivery and neonatal care. In addition, WHO, through the Palestinian National Institute of Public Health, developed a mammogram registry information system and a harmonized reproductive health registry to improve data quality and to reduce maternal and infant mortality by facilitating the introduction of reproductive health registries for better governance, targeting, health surveillance and accountability of public health initiatives in reproductive health.

31. The community mental health programme run by UNRWA pays particular attention to the needs of refugee children and women in the provision of counselling and psychosocial support, and works through a number of channels, including health centres, community-based organizations and schools. During the reporting period, the community mental health programme provided counselling for 2,247 women in Gaza through UNRWA health centres. WHO also worked with primary and secondary health-care workers to provide mental health services of higher quality. A total of 117 mental health professionals (68 men and 49 women) received specialized training in child and adolescent mental health; family therapy, which addresses gender-based violence; and cognitive behavioural therapy. Training was

delivered in 19 community mental health centres, 13 in the West Bank and 6 in Gaza, and in two psychiatric hospitals, one in the West Bank and one in Gaza.

32. WFP supported interactive training sessions for women in Gaza, on diet, hygiene, cooking, purchasing healthy food on a budget and caring for infants. Starting in November 2014, the husbands of women who had attended the training were also targeted through selected sessions, combining nutrition elements and psychosocial support. The training programme aimed to increase mutual understanding of women's empowerment and gender equality issues. The sessions, requested by women trainees, encouraged dialogue within communities and households, and promoted women's roles as agents of change. These interactive trainings also strengthened informal women's networks, facilitating their interaction outside the home and providing a peer support group beyond close relatives.

### **C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods**

33. Within their development programming, United Nations entities continued to prioritize initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and improve food security and livelihoods.

34. Women's access to housing is key to their enjoyment of other human rights. During the reporting period, UNRWA introduced a policy in Gaza that requires both the head of household and their spouse(s) to sign a joint undertaking, indicating a joint right to benefit. Prior to this practice, the head of household was the only required signatory for the housing units.

35. During the reporting period, 872,199 people benefited from food assistance under the emergency and social safety net assistance programmes run by UNRWA. Women represent 49.9 per cent of the cases, and around 22,715 of the families assisted were female-headed households. UNRWA recently reformed its poverty assessment system, as applied in Gaza, to include new categories, for women who are particularly vulnerable and who were not previously eligible for assistance owing to a requirement that they be registered under a husband's or father's name. The new categories include women in polygamous marriages, widows, divorced women and abandoned women, who can now apply for independent assessment and to receive food assistance from UNRWA directly. Similarly, in its social safety net assistance programme, WFP uses assessment criteria that include female-headed households as a vulnerable category. A gender perspective is mainstreamed through WFP activities by placing food distribution centres in areas close to households headed by women and issuing vouchers and food ration cards in women's names, when possible.

36. The job creation programme run by UNRWA in Gaza employed 23,490 persons, of whom 26 per cent female, for between 3 and 12 months each. The bulk of jobs offered by the programme were for unskilled labour (66.6 per cent). However, the programme faces challenges in finding culturally acceptable jobs for women as a result of social and cultural barriers. Currently, the majority of unskilled jobs for women are found in the agriculture sector (60 per cent of all beneficiaries in this sector are female).

37. As part of efforts to harness the economic potential of Palestinian women, UNDP provided support to women entrepreneurs in Gaza and the West Bank.

Through the provision of business development services, assets and access to solidarity and risk-sharing finance, 215 women entrepreneurs were able to start their own businesses, creating employment for at least 400 people. In addition, through its economic empowerment programme for deprived families, UNDP supported the creation of 1,420 micro-businesses, run by vulnerable households, 35 per cent of which are female-headed households. Families who were previously dependent on cash assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs have begun a journey out of poverty through running their own microprojects.

38. UNCTAD worked with the Palestinian Shippers Council to forge partnerships with the Palestinian Business Women Forum, provide its members with training and promote their active participation in the Shippers Council. Approximately 70 women members of the Forum were trained on the trade facilitation supply chain and participated in study tours to Europe and in the region to gain a better technical understanding of trade. The International Trade Centre provided training to Palestinian women-owned small and medium enterprises on the development of business plans and marketing.

39. FAO established two retail shops in the northern and southern West Bank to market agricultural products from more than 15 women's cooperatives. More than half of those received tools and equipment to enhance their production quality and capacity. More than 100 female farmers were supported through the construction of infrastructure for water collection or land rehabilitation. In Gaza, FAO supported 93 female-headed households with a package of agricultural tools, equipment and livestock. During the reporting period, FAO conducted several business trainings for 90 women members of six women's cooperatives, two of which are in the Gaza Strip. Each cooperative was also supported in establishing an effective finance and credit management system and links with reliable loan service providers, which enhanced women's capacity to manage loans.

40. UN-Women continued its implementation of the school canteen project, run by women. During the reporting period, nine additional community-based organizations were supported in managing and running sustainable businesses and providing work opportunities for women, bringing the total number of partner organizations in the project to 62. Of the 62, 36 have now reached financial independence and 18 are generating profit. A total of 72 additional women were employed during the reporting period, increasing the total number of women employees, through the different phases of the project, to 761. The women involved with the community-based organizations benefit from school canteen management training, financial management training, communication skills training and food processing training. The additional organizations were also provided with financial support to enable them to run and manage 28 new school canteens, bringing the total number of school canteens managed by women's community-based organizations to 337, in schools throughout the West Bank.

#### **D. Rule of law and violence against women**

41. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives designed to improve women's access to justice and enhance the capacity of institutions and personnel to prevent and respond to violence against women. The priority continued

to be supporting the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019).

42. Under their joint programme on the theme of “Strengthening the rule of law: justice and security for the Palestinian people”, UNDP and UN-Women provided support to justice and security institutions in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and procedures, including in the area of law-making. The Ministry of Justice and the High Judicial Council were supported in the development of gender-sensitive planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. The Gender Legislative Committee of the Ministry of Justice reviewed the Family Protection Law and provided recommendations to the Council of Ministers. As part of the programme’s efforts to develop specialized justice and security services for women and girls, 16 specialized prosecutors received follow-up coaching on investigating violence against women. Moreover, 19 senior officers from the Palestinian Civil Police concluded an accredited professional diploma course in public administration and gender, delivered by Birzeit University in partnership with the programme.

43. Women and girls continue to be the largest beneficiary group of legal aid services provided through the rule of law programme run by UNDP and UN-Women. Between January and June 2015, 3,657 women and girls, representing 55 per cent of all beneficiaries, benefited from legal advice, mediation and legal representation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In Gaza, women continue to constitute the vast majority of beneficiaries of legal services (75 per cent). As a result of the support provided through the programme, at least 20 legal verdicts were issued in early 2015 in favour of women receiving representation in sharia courts.

44. In Gaza, UNDP and UN-Women continued to support the work of the Awn Access to Justice Network, a network of civil society legal aid providers hosted by the Palestinian Bar Association. Eighteen mobile and fixed legal aid clinics provided legal assistance in cases related to land and property rights, as well as on a range of issues relating to family and personal status. Through community legal information sessions, more than 13,801 beneficiaries, 81 per cent of them female, were made aware of the rights and the services available to assist them.

45. In December 2014, UN-Women launched an in-depth research study on Palestinian women’s access to justice in the occupied West Bank.<sup>20</sup> The study discusses the ordeals faced by women victims of violence living in Area C, which comprises roughly 60 per cent of the West Bank and remains under the full civil and security control of Israel and the Israeli army. Without a formal justice system to turn to for the protection of their rights, these women are denied redress for discriminatory and patriarchal practices within their own communities. During the reporting period, ESCWA produced a study on access to justice for women and girls in the Arab region, covering aspects from the ratification to the implementation of international instruments, which focuses on access to justice, including for Palestinian women and girls under occupation.

46. A number of United Nations entities conducted awareness-raising activities regarding gender-based violence, with different target populations. ESCWA developed a toolkit to combat gender-based violence in the Arab region, which aims

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<sup>20</sup> UN-Women, “Access Denied: Palestinian Women’s Access to Justice in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territory” (UN-Women office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2014).

to ensure that service providers in Palestine have the necessary tools and methodological guidelines to protect victims of violence and ensure their physical and mental well-being. UNRWA, through its gender initiative, worked with community-based organizations in Gaza to hold trainings and seminars on ending violence against women. UNESCO partnered with Theatre Day Productions in Gaza to support women community leaders in raising public awareness against violence through storytelling of women's experiences of gender-based violence in the community. UNPFA trained men and boys, as well as religious leaders, on issues relating to reproductive health and gender-based violence. UNFPA also increased media attention surrounding the issue by supporting the development of a documentary film about gender-based violence and violations of inheritance law, as well as a documentary telling women's stories after the Gaza conflict.

47. A number of entities also supported services for women victims of violence. UN-Women has provided support to shelters for victims in the West Bank to begin the process of standardizing their procedures. WFP has also supported shelters by providing them with food assistance, reaching more than 80 women in four shelters. UNFPA trained 3,000 health-care providers in hospitals and primary health-care clinics to detect and respond to cases of gender-based violence. During the reporting period, UNFPA distributed 2,300 hygiene kits, which address a critical protection concern and core aspect of preserving dignity. The hygiene kits also included solar panels and flashlights, which may help mitigate the risk of gender-based violence for displaced women and adolescent girls in the caravans and shelters in the Gaza Strip.

48. UNODC continued to strengthen the capacity of the Palestinian ministries of justice and the interior and the Palestinian Civil Police to manage, administer, deliver and expand forensic services in accordance with international standards, including with regard to the investigation of cases of gender-based violence. Seven Palestinian doctors have received specialized training in collecting forensic evidence of sexual and gender-based violence. UNODC also launched two manuals for Palestinian forensic practitioners on specialized forensic medicine topics, including sexual and gender-based violence, which will help enable survivors to access high-quality health and forensic interventions, and will assist the Government of Palestine in the investigation and prosecution of such offences.

49. UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs collaborated closely to ensure that a gender perspective was mainstreamed in humanitarian coordination and response. Through the technical expertise of a humanitarian gender adviser, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN-Women, in coordination with UNFPA, developed a joint action plan to ensure accountability for gender equality and gender-based violence in humanitarian programming. The plan seeks to improve the availability and quality of data and analysis on gender-specific humanitarian needs, to develop the capacity of humanitarian actors for gender-responsive programming and to support women's organizations participating in humanitarian processes and responses.

## **E. Power and decision-making**

50. During the reporting period, UN-Women continued to support the newly established women's political participation caucus group, which reviewed the

by-laws and internal policies of nine political parties and presented conclusions to leaders of political parties, at a conference organized in December 2014. The result of the conference was a commitment by those leaders to follow up on the findings and recommendations of the group.

51. UN-Women continued to develop the capacity of media professionals to advocate and lobby for women's participation in politics and the decision-making process. Ten media professionals (four men and six women) in the West Bank and 12 media professionals (seven women and five men) in Gaza were trained on gender-sensitive media coverage and delivering key messages on women's issues.

52. Civil society involvement is critical for effective implementation of and reporting under the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UN-Women supported a coalition of non-governmental organizations from Gaza and the West Bank to prepare the first shadow report from the State of Palestine to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which complements the official government report, before the Committee's deliberations. UN-Women also trained 35 women's rights activists from a number of civil society organizations on international human rights frameworks and the shadow report drafting process.

53. Additionally, UN-Women continued its support to the newly established local committees in Gaza, which are made up of representatives from civil society and are responsible for monitoring local governance, by providing them with training on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and tools for advocacy. Similar local committees were also established, in 10 local councils, in three governorates of the West Bank. UN-Women continued its support to the shadow constitutional committee, comprised of young women and men, who drafted a gender-sensitive shadow constitution presented to national decision makers in December 2014, and also promoted a public advocacy campaign.

54. Through its national unity and social cohesion programme, UNDP supported a conference in June 2015 that gathered women's organizations and female politicians. The conference, which took place simultaneously in Ramallah and Gaza, with over 1,600 participants, was a forum for women of different political affiliations, religious and regional groupings to discuss joint strategies, speak out for peace and reconciliation, and review the factors that prevent women from engaging actively in the reconciliation processes.

55. UNICEF supported over 27,000 adolescents, of whom 54 per cent were girls, in receiving structured training, including leadership skills for girls to promote their participation in decision-making and community life. WFP also worked to empower women in decision-making processes by promoting a principle of 50 per cent representation of women on food management committees. In 2014-2015, up to 30 per cent of the members of local food management committees were women. Through its young women leaders programme, the gender initiative of UNRWA engaged recent female graduates in leadership training, to increase their readiness for active participation in their communities and the labour market.

56. UNESCO developed an online library and database to collect research and data on gender in Palestine.<sup>21</sup> The website includes an online calendar, which aims to coordinate and manage the different gender-related activities of national and international stakeholders. The website also functions as a research network for academic and civil society organizations to promote innovative research topics and circulate new publications on gender equality in Palestine. UNESCO also supported an in-depth study, following the 2014 conflict in Gaza, entitled “Women’s and men’s voices”, which is currently being finalized and will examine the impact of the conflict on gender relations.

## **F. Institutional development**

57. During the reporting period, OHCHR supported the State of Palestine in building capacity to implement and follow up on its human rights treaty commitments utilizing a multisectoral, harmonized human rights reporting and implementation approach, which seeks to ensure that a focus on gender-based discrimination is integrated into the processes of the seven human rights treaties to which the State of Palestine has acceded. OHCHR mobilized the United Nations country team to engage and coordinate treaty-reporting efforts, jointly conducting a number of workshops for government representatives on specific human rights. OHCHR also organized three trainings for Palestinian women’s organizations, presenting methods for monitoring and documenting women’s human rights violations, and facilitated one workshop for women’s human rights defenders on the compatibility of Palestinian laws with provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In Gaza, OHCHR implemented four trainings on human rights and gender-based violence and one workshop on women’s right to life, for female lawyers and women’s organizations.

58. ESCWA provided technical assistance and advisory services to the State of Palestine, including through the organization of two workshops on gender, change management and local development to strengthen the capacity of local government officials to mainstream gender equality principles at the community level. ESCWA also provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, in reviewing and developing the existing organizational structure, mandate and resources to advance the achievement of gender equality.

59. Through the multiple indicator cluster survey, UNICEF continued to strengthen the capacity of the Government to manage, monitor and conduct research and analysis on issues relating to children’s rights, gender equality, social protection and inclusion. The 2014 survey results provide a wealth of disaggregated data on the situation of women and children in the State of Palestine.

60. UN-Women continued its support to the Ministry of Finance on gender-responsive budgeting by providing an analysis of the public management financial system from a gender perspective and presenting recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the system. UN-Women also provided technical training on gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation to 30 staff members from gender units in different line ministries. Those staff members now have the skills to integrate a gender perspective into the sectoral strategies of line ministries and ensure planning

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<sup>21</sup> Database available from [www.pwrdc.ps](http://www.pwrdc.ps) and [www.unesco.org/ramallah](http://www.unesco.org/ramallah).

processes at the national level are responsive to the needs of Palestinian women. The training was followed by a meeting of ministers and deputy ministers to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the gender units in line ministries and how to effectively mainstream a gender perspective in national plans, policies and budgets. As a result, some of the gender units' focal points have been included in the planning and budgeting teams in line ministries, while other ministries have established gender units or institutionalized the current gender units in the formal organizational structure.

61. UN-Women supported the establishment of the gender marker reporting tool to track the extent of gender mainstreaming in the financial support provided by international donors to the Palestinian Authority. The gender marker was launched jointly by UN-Women and the Ministry of Planning and Administrative Development, and has been integrated into project tracking since July 2015. It will enable the Government to track financial allocations to priority areas and identify gaps. In turn, this will support an evidence-based dialogue with donors on the importance of financial allocations to gender equality issues.

#### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

**62. The reporting period was marked by the intensification of the humanitarian impact of the 2014 conflict and the slow pace of the recovery effort in Gaza. Women and girls in Gaza continued to experience displacement, loss of livelihood, limited access to basic services, restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, and the continuous threat of violence, including gender-based violence. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, settlement expansion and settler violence, the demolition of homes and livelihood structures, and restrictions on the freedom of movement persisted. Those violations have high costs for all Palestinian women, and in particular, for women in Bedouin communities faced with demolition orders, women working in agriculture, women living in communities targeted by settler violence, and girls whose access to education is impeded by violence. Efforts should be intensified to protect women from all forms of violence and reconstruction efforts in Gaza should be expedited. A gender perspective should be central to the relief and recovery work of the United Nations system and gender equality programming should be adequately financed.**

**63. Insecurity and poverty have continued to exacerbate gender-based discrimination and gender inequality in the State of Palestine, leading to elevated levels of violence against women and girls. In support of the Government of Palestine's efforts to combat gender-based violence, the United Nations has worked to improve women's access to justice in relation to gender-based violence, through initiatives for strengthening the rule of law. United Nations entities should further deepen their efforts to support survivors of gender-based violence, developing a comprehensive approach that ensures access to the full range of quality essential multisectoral services. Taking into account the comparative advantages and expertise of individual entities across the United Nations system, such a holistic approach should include ensuring access to quality health care, psychosocial counselling, legal services and material and financial assistance. Further, United Nations entities should continue to work with all key actors and groups to prevent gender-based**



violence, including with men and boys, to address the root causes, risk factors and structural issues that lead to violence. The Government of Palestine should also be supported in developing normative frameworks in line with international standards and defining national standards on ending violence against women.

64. Limited economic opportunities exist for Palestinian women and a major gender gap persists in labour market participation. High unemployment rates, especially among young women, are particularly worrisome. The existing vulnerability in the two main sectors where women find employment, the services sector and agriculture, compounded by increased care burdens owing to a lack of access to water, energy and markets, all contribute to women's deteriorating economic situation. Assistance should aim to increase women's access to decent work, including in non-traditional sectors, and address women's economic vulnerability resulting from the concentration of their employment in informal and unpaid work.

65. The lack of access to justice for Palestinian women and girls remains a grave concern, with outdated and discriminatory laws, social restrictions, a lack of physical access to judicial institutions and the fragmentation of territory all posing challenges. United Nations entities should provide assistance to governance mechanisms that seek to modernize and harmonize legislation on gender equality and women's human rights. Assistance to transitional security and justice sectors, as well as informal justice mechanisms, should build the capacity of those sectors to apply women's human rights standards throughout the justice system, on the basis of the State of Palestine's accession to seven core human rights treaties.

66. Many of the recommendations put forward in previous reports regarding improvements in the areas of education, health and political participation for Palestinian women and girls have not yet been fully implemented and continue to require sustained effort. In particular, renewed efforts should be made to ensure that Palestinian women play a leading role in reconciliation efforts. All relevant actors must insist on women's participation in negotiations and contribute to providing an enabling environment for Palestinian women to express their views and form coalitions across political factions. Support to Palestinian women's non-governmental organizations should be a central aspect of the United Nations system's gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.

67. Data disaggregated by sex and age and gender-sensitive analysis are essential to all efforts to advance the situation of women and girls in Palestine. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and a number of United Nations entities have made improvements to systems for gender-sensitive collection and analysis of data and are able to collect disaggregated data of quality on a range of issues. However, data gaps remain as regards women's economic roles, their access to property rights and gender-based violence. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics will conduct a census in 2017, which provides an important opportunity to address some of those gaps. Additional specialized surveys, including on sexual violence, employment and time-use, and enhanced registration and reporting mechanisms are necessary to improve the quality and availability of data and its analysis.

68. **The United Nations will continue working towards the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Improving the situation of Palestinian women remains inextricably linked to such efforts. The development by the Government of Palestine of a national strategy on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) makes an important contribution in this regard, highlighting a national commitment to women's empowerment and the protection of women's human rights. The adoption of Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security reiterates the importance of such national plans and calls for adequate resourcing for their implementation. In this regard, United Nations system entities should continue to support national efforts to deliver on the Palestinian national strategy on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and all other efforts to achieve commitments to women, peace and security in the State of Palestine.**

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