



Palestine – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 18 May 2012

Information on the treatment of women in Palestine, specifically Gaza, including honour based violence. Treatment of those outside of a traditional Muslim community, for example, a single mother.

The Introduction to a report from *Freedom House* states:

“Palestinian women currently face two major types of obstacles to their rights: those arising from within their own culture and society, and those imposed as the result of occupation, war, and civil unrest. On the domestic front, women are subjected to restrictive personal status laws, which retain discriminatory provisions related to marriage, divorce, and child custody. Domestic abuse remains a significant problem, and violence against women has increased in recent years. Discriminatory laws and traditions also affect women's inheritance, alimony, and employment opportunities, thereby reducing their economic autonomy and making them more vulnerable to poverty than men. Furthermore, some segments of society seem to be growing more conservative and returning to traditional values.” (Freedom House (3 March 2010) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 - Palestine (Palestinian Authority and Israeli Occupied Territories)*)

This report also states:

“The new, more conservative social order imposed by Hamas has led to greater restrictions on women's rights in Gaza. For example, reports have started surfacing of women being warned against immodesty, lawyers being forced to wear the veil in courts, female students being forced to wear the veil in schools, and Hamas targeting women's rights activists. Under media and civil society pressure, Hamas has denied its involvement in these incidents. Women in the West Bank, by contrast, have continued to enjoy a more liberal environment.” (Ibid)

In a section titled “Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person” this report states:

“Violence against women reflects the broader violence and lack of rule of law in the Palestinian territories, and it has become more common over the last five years. Honor killings remain a problem, though the true toll is uncertain, as a number may go unreported. A coalition of women's organizations, Al-Muntada, published a report in 2007 that found 32 cases of honor killings in Palestine between 2004 and 2006. Seventeen of those murders occurred in 2006 alone – 12 in the Gaza Strip and 5 in the West Bank. The PCBS [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics] reported that at least 10 women were victims of honor killings in 2007. In response to the violence, seven women's rights and human rights organizations submitted a memorandum to President Abbas, urging the issuance of a presidential decree treating honor killings as murders. However, no such decree had been issued as of October 2009.” (Ibid)

A report published by the *Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)*, in a section titled “Violence and Insecurity in the Street”, states:

“Palestinian women who do not outwardly conform to their expected roles within society are at risk of judgment and harassment. For example, electing to not wear the hijab or jilbab (veil or long coat), a form of dress observed by many Muslim women, is viewed in some communities as unacceptable.” (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) *Palestinian Women and Security: Why Palestinian Women and Girls Do Not Feel Secure*, p.24)

In a section titled “Murder in the Name of Honour” this report states:

“Murder in the name of honour, also referred to as femicide, has captured the attention of many Palestinian women and girls, despite the lack of a clear sense on the prevalence of the practice. Mentioned during focus groups sessions and in-depth interviews, discussion of murder in the name of honour tended to revolve around women’s fears more than actual cases, with a few exceptions. Women perceive the issue of femicide as a real danger. If their behaviour is viewed as a threat to the family’s honour and reputation, they feared being subjected to this kind of violence. Rumours might grow out of proportion, affecting the woman’s family, and ultimately putting her own life at risk. The prevalent feeling is that the whole community places female behaviour under scrutiny and that there is no recourse for women whose conduct is deemed unacceptable.” (ibid, p.37)

An *International Crisis Group* report, in a section titled “Islamisation?”, states:

“Moreover, amid Gaza’s intensifying isolation and accompanying withdrawal of a Western presence, social mores have grown increasingly conservative and patriarchal – a process that some of Hamas’s more zealous militants, particularly within the security forces, have encouraged. The time devoted to religious instruction in schools has increased, and some teachers are known to punish girls who do not wear the veil. Although women continue to walk the streets unveiled, and officials say there has been no ruling on dresscode, Hamas militants are known to have enjoined some women to don scarves. Similarly while Hamas has curbed the killing of women on grounds of immorality, unmarried couples in cars reported some cases of being beaten and detained.” (International Crisis Group (19 March 2008) *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas*, p.16)

The 2011 *Freedom House* report for Gaza, in a section titled “Political Rights and Civil Liberties”, states:

“Under Hamas, personal status law is derived almost entirely from Sharia, which puts women at a stark disadvantage in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and domestic abuse. Rape, domestic abuse, and ‘honor killings,’ in which relatives murder women for perceived sexual or moral transgressions, are common, and these crimes often go unpunished. A December 2009 study by the Palestinian Woman’s Information and Media Center found that 77 percent of women in Gaza had experienced violence of various sorts, 53 percent had experienced physical violence, and 15 percent had suffered sexual abuse. Under Hamas, women’s dress and movements in public have been increasingly restricted by the so-called morality police, who are tasked with enforcing orthodox Islamic customs. The government has barred women from wearing trousers in public and declared that all women must wear hijab in public buildings, though these policies are enforced sporadically. In 2010, the government banned women from smoking water pipes and men from cutting women’s hair.” (Freedom House (9 June 2011) *Freedom in the World 2011 - Gaza Strip*)

The 2011 *US Department of State* country report on Israel and the Palestinian territories, in a section titled "The Occupied Territories (Including Areas Subject to the Jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority)", refers to the situation for women as follows:

" Hamas maintained control of the Gaza Strip and enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam on the Gaza Strip's Muslim populations, which particularly discriminated against women. Authorities prohibited any public mixing of the sexes. Plainclothes officers routinely stopped, separated, and questioned couples to determine if they were married; premarital sex is a crime punishable by imprisonment. Hamas's 'morality police' also punished women for riding motorcycles and dressing 'inappropriately.' Hamas operated a women's prison to hold women convicted of 'ethical crimes' such as 'illegitimate pregnancy.'" (US Department of State (8 April 2011) *2010 Human Rights Report: Israel and the occupied territories*)

An article from *The Guardian* states:

"It began with a rash of unusually assertive police patrols. Armed Hamas officers stopped men from sitting shirtless on the beach, broke up groups of unmarried men and women, and ordered shopkeepers not to display lingerie on mannequins in their windows. Then came an effort to force female lawyers to abide by a more conservative dress code, and intense pressure on parents to dress their daughters more conservatively for the new school term. Last week police began enforcing a new decree banning women from riding on motorbikes. For the first time since Hamas won Palestinian parliamentary elections nearly four years ago, the group is trying to Islamise Gazan society." (The Guardian (18 October 2009) *Hamas patrols beaches in Gaza to enforce conservative dress code*)

A *Los Angeles Times* article states:

"A notorious example is the expanded role of Gaza's 'morality police.' Last summer, these black-uniformed police began to patrol the beaches to ensure that men and women are dressed 'appropriately' -- there is no written rule, but a woman was punished for swimming in a T-shirt and jeans -- and that unrelated men and women are not mingling. They make sure clothing stores display only modestly dressed female mannequins in their windows. They have enforced bans on women riding motorcycles and on male hairdressers working in women's hair salons. Couples walking down the street are routinely stopped, separated and questioned by plainclothes officers asking whether they're married. 'You basically have to carry a copy of your marriage license on you at all times, or risk being humiliated,' one young couple told us. And parents say their daughters are under pressure to dress more conservatively for school." (Los Angeles Times (27 June 2010) *In Gaza, prisoners twice over*)

This article also states:

"Although the morality code's enforcers enjoy impunity for their abuses, several inmates of Gaza's central prison appear to be guilty of nothing but bad luck. We met a mother of three children who couldn't produce a marriage certificate, was accused of committing adultery -- with her husband -- and was jailed despite her testimony that her family has prevented her from obtaining the necessary documents because they disapprove of her marriage." (Ibid)

An *International Crisis Group* report states:

“None of this is meant either to suggest the government has refrained from Islamising or to minimise the impact of such efforts on their targets. Alcohol consumption, for example – illegal for Muslims since 1936 – has been prohibited to residents and visitors of all faiths. Men and women are prevented from dancing together at parties. And human rights organisations have documented such cases as a nineteen-year-old man in jail without trial because he is gay and a mother of three incarcerated for committing adultery with her husband – because her family disapproved of the union and prevented her from obtaining a marriage certificate.” (International Crisis Group (29 March 2011) *Radical Islam in Gaza*, p.31)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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