



## VIRTUAL EVENT

# *“Women, Peace and Security and Beijing+25: Progress and Challenges for Women and Girls in Palestine”*

Convened by the  
UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP)

10 March 2021

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### CHAIR SUMMARY

The panel “**Women, Peace and Security and Beijing+25: Progress and Challenges**” on the margins of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was convened virtually, on 10 March 2021, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The event was moderated by H.E. Ms. Adela Raz, Vice-Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by the Vice-Chair and H.E. Ms. Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. The panel speakers comprised of H.E. Ms. Amal Jadou, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (State of Palestine), Ms. Hind Houry, former Minister of State for Jerusalem Affairs (State of Palestine), and Ms. Noor Swirki, a community activist from the Gaza Strip. Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx platform. Viewers watched the conference on UN WebTV and the Committee social media channels and had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists.

At the opening, **Vice-Chair Raz** introduced the theme of this year’s CSW as “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence against women.” She explained the reference to the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as a watershed moment for equality between men and women and for defining women’s rights as “human rights.” However, the road to full equality and empowerment of women in many countries including Palestine remained long. On the situation of Palestinian women, she spoke of their burden from living under 54-year-long Israeli military occupation and the limitations it placed on their basic human, social, economic, and political rights as well as their struggle with traditional social norms. The focus on political participation of Palestinian women became even more relevant in view of the announced elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) in 2021 and because of the need to increase female representation in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) while addressing many inequalities, including the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on Palestinian women.

In her introductory remarks, **Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser** spoke of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women as an opportunity to shed light on the challenges facing Palestinian women and girls in the OPT, 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing platform and 20 years since the adoption of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Although progress was made over the last two decades, many striking inequities remained, and they were being exacerbated by the pandemic. Furthermore, any progress made had been repeatedly undermined by the Israeli occupation, which had affected every aspect of life, inflicted a protracted humanitarian and protection crisis, and exacerbated the challenges faced by Palestinian women and girls due to societal and cultural norms.

Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser, however, underlined how Palestinian women across the region and in diasporas had carved for themselves a pivotal role in their society and in building peace, reconstruction, and development of the Palestinian nation: they had adapted across generations to thrive, overcome hardship while cooperating with each other in grassroots movements and in multiple social and economic sectors. In addition to heading and preserving their own households, Palestinian women had excelled in many professional fields to become writers, artists, ministers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, humanitarians, and innovators. This engagement helped to fast-track their participation in the socio-economic life of Palestine and eased the cultural patriarchy. Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser called for women's equitable place in the Palestinian struggle to achieve the right to self-determination and genuine Israeli-Palestinian peace and security, and for them to be granted leadership roles in the diplomatic arena. She called for the fulfilment of the Beijing platform and SCR1325 as well as the relevant resolutions on the question of Palestine, as they were key for the attainment of inclusion of Palestinian women and a just resolution to the conflict.

**Ms. Hind Khoury** spoke of the humbling perseverance and resilience of Palestinian women, particularly those under siege in the Gaza Strip and those kept in Israeli prisons for their political activism. As International Women's Day was observed that week, their courage needed to be celebrated. She concurred that a lot of progress had been achieved since the Beijing conference: Palestinian women had joined movements against the occupation through public diplomacy, demonstrations, boycotts, organization of popular resistance, provision of humanitarian assistance and social services. The First Intifada had been key in bringing women's social and national recognition in the public sphere. Ms. Khoury explained that the signing of the Oslo Accords, almost coinciding with the Beijing conference in 1995 and carrying a promise of autonomy, freedom, and increased participation of Palestinian women in national processes, had however regrettably entrenched the Israeli occupation following the assassination of Prime Minister Isaac Rabin the same year and Israel's subsequent efforts to nullify the agreement. Since that time, the Israeli occupation had dramatic consequences on the lives of Palestinian women and girls through the rise of poverty, denial of access to natural resources, settler-violence, and military oppression along with the isolation and "Judaization" of East Jerusalem and the blockade of Gaza.

Ms. Khoury explained that the regression in Palestinian women's rights since the Oslo Accords was marked by the gradual change of focus in women's agenda, i.e. away from directly addressing the national struggle to end the Israeli occupation and daily oppression to addressing their own grievances in terms of gender equality and social issues. The system of impunity and

denial of accountability for Israeli violations, along with deterioration of the Palestinian democratic institutions and absence of elections, led to the exclusion of the population from the public discourse, and especially Palestinian youth and women who represent the majority of the population. The fragmentation and division among Palestinian factions over the Oslo Accords and the absence of a successful strategy for liberation in which women could find their place and political role contributed equally to further exclude them. So did the highly skewed balance of power between Palestine and Israel in the peace negotiations and the growing rift between the Palestinian Authority and grassroots organizations. The further demise of the General Union for Palestinian Women (GUPW) led to the mushrooming of women organizations in a donor-driven environment. Ms. Khoury equally criticized Israeli women movements for being politicized and for not addressing enough the issue of occupation. In her closing remarks, she spoke of a renewed hope for a return to multilateral diplomacy after the change in the US administration and the announcement of Palestinian elections. Ms. Khoury made an appeal to Israeli women to play a stronger role in bringing peace between Israel and Palestine. They had succeeded in building important movements such as Women Wage Peace but failed to address the multiple woes of the Israeli occupation and take a political stance on the issue of discrimination, settler-violence, and dispossession.

**Minister Amal Jadou** called for reimagining the Palestinian socio-political system, as it was impossible for the Palestinian people to reignite a path to liberate their homeland with half of their population marginalized. Palestinian women faced an uphill struggle to take up their role in the country while facing the “double violence” of the Israeli occupation and high rates of domestic abuse in their households. She called attention to the women representation quota (26 per cent in lieu of the requested 30 per cent) in the Palestine Legislative Council (PLC) and called for a 50 per cent quota in the future. In addition, she pointed how statistics showed a shocking gap of 72 per cent in ministerial positions with women usually being offered “soft” roles in social affairs and health and not in foreign policy and finance, for example. Also, out of 16 Governors in Palestine there was only one woman, and 12 women ambassadors out of 107. A gap of 65 per cent also existed in the judicial system.

For Minister Jadou, the upcoming elections brought nonetheless a hope for better representation of women and youth within the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and ranks of the leadership. Following the post-Oslo Accords phase and a decrease in women participation in peace negotiations, Palestinian women had since focused on social needs and left the political sphere. She highlighted the importance of a higher representation of women in the PLC to address their plight in all sectors of society.

As for ending the Israeli occupation, Minister Jadou recalled the international community’s responsibility in the implementation of UN resolutions, which have continued to be violated by Israel since the partition plan. However, responsibility also fell on Palestinian women who needed to partner with men to forge the path to the liberation of Palestine. Education and training on leadership roles, raising awareness by the media and a buy-in from the private sector could all contribute to reach this goal. In closing, she stressed how, without the liberation of half of the Palestinian population, there would not be a liberation from the occupation.

**Ms. Noor Swirki** highlighted the Palestinian presidential decree dated 2 March 2021 restricting the autonomy of civil society and called for the modification of the relief associations

and non-governmental organizations law adopted in 2000. She highlighted how Palestinian civil society and women's groups were crucial partners of the State of Palestine in view of ending the Israeli occupation. She further explained how traditional social norms as well as the Palestinian de facto authority in the Strip and its measures to restrict civil society's work affected Palestinian women organizations and the civic space in Gaza. This "unsupportive public atmosphere" was reflected in the quality and quantity of women participation, she said. Women were excluded from the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process and the latest talks in Cairo as well as from the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, other national committees, and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence denying women in Gaza the possibility of contributing to a peaceful and sustainable society. This was particularly serious in Gaza, suffering from a dire humanitarian situation as a result of the Israeli blockade and constant military escalation.

In terms of ways forward, Ms. Swirki described the Palestinian elections as the "light at the end of the tunnel," particularly for women who were looking for an opportunity for change and for addressing their legal, protection and healthcare needs as well as their economic empowerment at the national level. The Central Election Commission informed that half of the eligible voters were women, hence these elections, also thanks to an increase in the quota for representation on the lists for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), could bring tangible incremental steps towards a better political participation and the rehabilitation of the Palestinian political system.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, on ways to ensure the inclusion and participation of Palestinian women at all levels of decision-making, **Ms. Khoury** spoke of the need for an opportunity for Palestinian women to participate in the public sphere, including the upcoming elections, considering their already high political awareness. Heads of lists had already made commitments to include more women. As for the donor community's role, there was a need to recognize the drawbacks of a proliferation of NGOs, which had become a major source of economic income for women in the absence of a development plan and the shrinking of the agricultural sector. She called for the strengthening of the General Union of Palestinian Women and for the inclusion of women in professional unions.

**Minister Jadou** spoke of the Palestinian government's progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with the help of the Ministry of Women Affairs and women's groups. As for the international community's contribution to increasing women's role in politics, she gave the example of a Ministry of Women Affairs' project, supported by several European countries, to train 30 women graduates from different Palestinian universities and sectors on leadership skills.

On existing national mechanisms and national reconciliation, **Ms. Swirki** explained that efforts led by the Ministry of Women Affairs to implement SCR 1325 could be cited as an example of national mechanism to enhance promotion, accountability, and participation of women in decision-making. As for civil society and elections in Gaza, she mentioned women's participation as potential observers and in raising awareness on procedures and on the importance of the political process. Women, however, remained excluded from national reconciliation efforts by the concerned parties. Finally, she called for unconditional funding of

civil society in Gaza and for an amendment to the Presidential decree in order to increase the civic space and women's participation in it.

The representative of **Cuba** welcomed the event to raise awareness and denounce the situation of Palestinian women facing the ongoing and intensifying Israeli occupation and reiterated Cuba's solidarity with the Palestinian people. The representative of **Egypt** lauded the perseverance of Palestinian women in times of great difficulties and highlighted the importance of the "3Rs" approach – Rights, Representation and Resources – in advancing women empowerment. In the Palestinian context, "rights" have broader parameters and include rights to self-determination and return, adding levels of struggle to attain full empowerment. He underlined that Palestinian women's rights are intertwined with the Palestinian struggle for independence. The representative of **Turkey** appreciated hearing the panellists' experiences both in terms on Palestinian rights and women's rights. She noted that more needed to be done to increase women's participation in negotiations in the Middle East Peace Process.

In her closing, **Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser** reiterated the need for collective action by the international community and accountability vis-à-vis Israel in its responsibility to uphold UN resolutions and abide by international law. She called on all Member States to work together in order to achieve a just solution that would guarantee the rights of the Palestinian people, including women's rights, and the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. She lauded the panellists' presentations as they reminded of Palestinian women's strength and resilience and the enormous contribution they continued to make to the Palestinian struggle for justice, freedom, and equal rights. The panellists had also pointed out at internal issues that needed to be prioritized on the road to equality and freedom. She finally saluted the efforts of the many UN agencies and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in the capacity-building of women and girls for their full empowerment.

**Ambassador Raz** closed the event.

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*\*\*\*Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the virtual Event. A video of the Event can be found on the webpage of the CEIRPP, [www.un.unispal.org](http://www.un.unispal.org) as well as in its official Facebook page and YouTube account.*

*\*\*\*Note: The views and opinions expressed in this summary are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.*