



VIRTUAL EVENT

On the margins of the Commission on the status of Women

“Impact of forced displacement on Palestinian women”

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

23 March 2022

CHAIR SUMMARY

The event **“Impact of forced displacement on Palestinian women”** held on the margins of the 66th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was convened virtually, on 23 March 2022, 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. Mr. Neville Gertze, Vice-Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Namibia 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 comprised of Ms. Amy Cohen, Director of International Relations and Advocacy, Ir Amim; Ms. Reem Hamad, and Ms. Amani Odeh, residents of the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, respectively; Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Head of Office of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT); and Ms. Inas Margieh, UN Women Programme Coordinator, Palestine Country Office. Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx platform. The event was livestreamed on UN WebTV as well as the Committee social media channels and the public had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists.

At the opening, **Vice-Chair Gertze** explained that Israel’s policies and practices had forced the displacement of Palestinians, including Bedouin and refugee communities, while further entrenching its occupation. In recent months, Israeli authorities had enforced or attempted to enforce evictions of Palestinian residents from their homes in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in favour of Jewish settlers. As a result, Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem had endured violent attacks by Israeli settlers and disproportionate use of force by the Israeli Security Forces. He added that women bore most of the collective burden of such policies and practices, which resulted in forced family separation, displacement, threats to their physical integrity, arrests and detention of their children, as well as discrimination in almost every aspect of daily life.

In her introductory remarks, **Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser** spoke of the broad impact of decades of Israel’s illegal policies and practices on Palestinian women that systematically

forced them and their families from their homes and lands. These actions have had traumatic consequences on their lives and the enjoyment of their human rights and on the prospects for the peaceful and secure life the Palestinian people have sought for so many years. She stressed that Palestinian people had the right to a home and to live in security in it and expressed her gratitude to the Committee for organizing this event, thanked Ambassador Neville Gertze for Namibia's unwavering solidarity with Palestine, and expressed appreciation to the panelists for sharing their perspectives with the Committee and wider audience.

Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser stressed further that the role of women was central to the struggle to realize justice and freedom for the Palestinian people and to achieve a just and lasting solution, highlighting the human rights violations being perpetrated by Israeli forces and armed, extremist settlers, as well as the discriminatory laws enacted by the Israeli government, against the Palestinian people. The constant threat of displacement and seizure of properties and expulsion of Palestinian families from their homes causes severe distress and trauma in the lives of Palestinian women, undermining their security and affecting their ability to care for their children and families and to pursue their livelihoods. Since early 2021, Israel, the occupying Power, has demolished more than 1,000 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, forcibly displacing more than 1,400 Palestinians, including women and girls.

Ms. Amy Cohen spoke of how the drivers of displacement were aimed at weakening the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, while eroding conditions for a future Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. These drivers have included policies on land confiscation and settlement construction, denial of full citizenship and political rights, permanent residency revocations, insufficient service provision, and severe restrictions on urban planning and building in East Jerusalem. More recently, home demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families had increasingly driven Palestinians from both their individual homes and their collective home - Jerusalem. Such measures had a disproportionate impact on Palestinian women who are the traditional caretakers of the home and the backbone of Palestinian family and community life, in violation of international law and UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2334 and Resolution 1325, which specifically address both the vulnerability of women in conflict zones and their unique contribution to peacebuilding and security.

Ms. Cohen emphasized that entire Palestinian communities across East Jerusalem were under impending threat of expulsion, particularly in the Old City and adjacent Palestinian neighbourhoods. Many of the families facing eviction were Palestinian refugees who lost homes in what became Israel in 1948 and now risked being displaced for a second time. Settler groups working in collusion with state bodies had acted to secure property ownership rights of these assets. In parallel, the risk of mass demolitions of some 200 homes in Al Bustan, Wadi Yasul, and Al Walajeh, placed another 2,500 Palestinians at risk of displacement. In all of these areas, demolition orders had been issued under the pretext of lacking building permits which are nearly impossible to procure due to the absence of proper zoning plans which the Israeli authorities have systematically neglected to advance and/or approve.

Following the vision of an OCHA-produced video showing her family life, **Ms. Reem Hamad** described how 28 residential units, including her family home, were under the constant threat of forced displacement in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Karm al Jaouni (Sheikh Jarrah). Ms. Hamad still lives with her children in the house where her ancestors, refugees from Haifa, moved to in 1956. She recounted the stress she experienced after receiving eviction orders

in 2020, as well as the fear felt when leaving her home, fearing that settlers could take over the house during her absence. Palestinians faced violence and threat from settlers and Israeli Security Forces, including direct intimidation, use of pepper spray, sound bombs, rubber bullets and skunk water. This situation caused a lot of physical and psychological trauma to the local inhabitants, and to children, such as insomnia, pulmonary issues and anxiety. Ms. Hamad also explained how the local community advocated for its rights, taking example from activists such as Ms. Mona al-Kurd and her social media campaign #savesheikhjarrah.

Ms. Amani Odeh shared her experience of living in her family home under threat of imminent demolition in al-Bustan, recalling the tension in the area, confrontations with settlers and daily arrests, including of her own family members, as well as the high number of children. She recalled her own arrest, during the night, because of her activism. She explained how her story was like that of many other families.

Ms. Sarah Muscroft presented the general context of demolitions and displacement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, stressing the difficulties to understand the scale of displacement without witnessing it. Planning regime, access restrictions, settler violence and excessive use of force further contributed to translating a macro-aggression onto the daily lives of Palestinians, with women being disproportionately affected. In East Jerusalem, at least 218 Palestinian households comprising 970 people, including 424 children, had eviction cases pending in Israeli courts.

Ms. Muscroft informed that many “illegal” structures had outstanding demolition orders, including 55 schools, because of the impossibility to obtain a building permit in Area C. Around 660,000 settlers live in 250 settlements, and settler violence increased with 1,776 incidents recorded since 2017. Finally, the excessive use of force by Israel Security Forces contributed to the coercive environment in the OPT, with over 4,000 Palestinians, including approximately 1,000 children, and around 100 Israelis killed during four successive escalations of hostilities since 2008.

Ms. Inas Margieh emphasized the importance of amplifying the voices of young East Jerusalemite women to achieve sustainable solutions. This year, CSW meeting’s priority theme ‘Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes’ put youth at the centre of this agenda. Too little had changed 26 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, but the Generation Equality Action Coalitions took on six critical issues underpinning gender equality and youth leadership as critical for this transformative vision. UN Women supports the fundamental engagement of young Palestinian women leaders from East Jerusalem in describing their reality and providing their views on how to overcome challenges and achieve success in diverse walks of life.

East Jerusalemites living under Israel’s occupation and the threat of settlers’ violence, endure political, social and cultural restrictions, including unemployment affecting young women more than young men. The labour force participation for women in East Jerusalem stood at 10.4 percent in 2021, in comparison to 34.8 percent for men. These challenges limited the realization of women’s potential and the realization of their aspirations in different domains. However, young women leaders from East Jerusalem sought to change the paradigm from victims to drivers of social change, putting forward solutions to address stereotypes and

traditional opinions, supporting the role of women leaders with disabilities as well as the role of young women leaders in defending the rights of Jerusalemites in general, their labour participation and economic leadership. Youth female leaders also supported initiatives that enhance the role of young women and their participation in public spaces and challenging stereotypes.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, Ms. Reem Hamad and Ms. Amy Cohen responded to a question on assistance for cases of evictions and demolitions that many affected families were left without immediate support or long-term solutions and had to rely on personal networks. On the use of social media, Ms. Inas Margieh emphasized the importance of their use to amplify the voices of the affected people. Legal support to those families remained difficult and local organizations mandated to support women and affected populations lacked resources, increasing the importance of properly identifying their needs. Ms. Cohen recalled the impact of recent activism conducted by young Palestinian women from Sheikh Jarrah who capitalized on social media to change the discourse on Palestinian rights and forced displacement since 1948. It was essential not to censure these voices to support advocacy and lobbying campaigns and shift the global discourse on those issues. Ms. Margieh spoke of the responsibilities of the occupying Power to uphold the human rights of Palestinian people, including the rights to education and shelter, with considerations of their identity, ethnicity or gender.

In her closing remarks, **Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser** thanked the panellists for their presentations and testimonies as they reminded of the extent and the impact of the violations perpetuated by Israel against the Palestinian people, and Palestinian women in particular. She lauded the Palestinian women's resilience and the enormous contribution they continued to make to the Palestinian struggle for justice and accountability. She recalled that the space for civil society in Palestine was shrinking, as Israel continued its intimidation and harassment of civil society even going to the extent of outlawing some organizations, including those supporting women. She finally saluted the efforts of the many organizations, UN agencies and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their assistance to and capacity-building efforts for women and girls for their full empowerment, urging states and organizations to strengthen their relationships with the Committee.

Ambassador Gertze 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 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.*