



## **Statement by UN Special Procedures Experts**

**14 December 2023**

### **Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel: Women and girls face exacerbated violence, inequalities and discrimination and see their future destroyed in front of their eyes**

Amidst relentless war, deprivations, and displacement, women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel face exacerbated violence, inequalities, and discrimination. We call for a permanent ceasefire, cessation of forced displacement and immediate adequate humanitarian intervention to protect the human rights and futures of women and girls. We are profoundly concerned with the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. The tragic consequences of this conflict will be disproportionately borne by women and girls for generations.

Since 7 October 2023, Israel's intense bombardment on Gaza has reportedly killed nearly 12,000 women and children. 2,784 women have become widows and new heads of households. In total, 1.1 million women and girls are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter, water, and sanitation. Israel's bombing of water and sanitation facilities and interference with power supplies have nearly destroyed access to these critical services. These numbers will only increase unless a permanent ceasefire is instituted and immediate access granted to all humanitarian actors to provide adequate support, including healthcare.

We reiterate our concern about the impact of the conflict on the health of women and girls and we are particularly alarmed at pregnant women's ongoing struggle to access medical care for themselves and their babies, in violation of the heightened protection they are granted under international humanitarian law. Pregnant women, along with young children, older persons and persons with disabilities, are at higher risk of communicable diseases, malnutrition, and death, all of which become increasingly likely as Gaza's civilian infrastructure collapses.

Women and girls in particular conditions of vulnerability, such as older women and women and girls with disabilities, are living in unimaginable circumstances. Older women are facing hardships due to chronic illnesses, reliance on care and limited mobility caused by aging. The impact on women and girls with disabilities has been devastating, as there has been a total breakdown of already limited care and support systems, accessible physical and informational infrastructure and access to assistive devices, medicines, and other needs. Any prospect they had of living independently and being heard has been shattered.

We are concerned that the crisis has reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes in the household that negatively impact the rights of women and girls. Girls now spend more time caring for their families, and women of all ages continue to disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care work. These burdens may also further impact the mental health of women of all ages and girls, significantly adding to their long-term emotional and psychological trauma.

The harms weigh particularly heavily on young girls. We are especially concerned about both the short- and long-term prospects for girls in Gaza. The disruption of schooling, collapse of the healthcare system, massive destruction of housing, overcrowded shelters, and the general breakdown of physical and social structures and the rule of law, will impact the well-being and future prospects of girls in all aspects of their lives, especially those orphaned or separated/displaced due to the conflict. The harmful effects of the current crisis – including risks of early/forced marriage, neglect, and violence - will have a profound bearing on future generations of women and girls. Palestinian girls are seeing their future – already fragile after 56 years of Israeli military occupation – destroyed in front of their eyes.

Further prolonged displacement or forcible transfer of Palestinians would gravely exacerbate these many harms. Israel's bombardment has reportedly displaced 951,490 women and girls from their homes. These women and girls are increasingly facing malnutrition and family separation and are at risk of sexual violence and trafficking.

Displacement has been shown to have long-term negative impacts on education, income, pensions, family care and support and mental and physical health. To mitigate these impacts, the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement state that all international actors must prevent and avoid conditions that lead to internal displacement, with extra protection and consideration for older women, women with disabilities, mothers and children. Israel has a clear legal responsibility to ensure that its use of force does not lead to mass displacement of civilians. We call on the State of Israel to fulfill these basic obligations.

We also remain concerned about women and girls in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, who have faced heightened discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, and attacks by Israeli authorities and settlers since 7 October. Women and girls continue to face draconian restrictions on family unification and freedom of movement. Moreover, they are at the constant risk of settler violence and arbitrary arrest and detention by Israeli occupation forces, which has kept them confined to their homes and deprived of their livelihoods. We urge Israel, as the occupying power, to fulfill its duty to prevent and protect women and girls, including women human rights defenders, from arbitrary detention, discrimination and violence and to ensure access to justice and accountability for those responsible.

We also hold great concern over the hostage-taking of Israeli women and girls by Hamas, in some circumstances amounting to acts tantamount to enforced disappearance. We call on Hamas and other armed groups to ensure the immediate, unconditional, safe and secure release of all hostages.

Women and girls often experience distinct, devastating forms of violence during conflict, rooted in gender discrimination and inequality, including sexual violence, deployed systematically as a weapon of war. We are alarmed at increasing reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups against women in Israel on 7 October 2023, as well as sexual assault and threats of sexual violence against women in the occupied Palestinian territory since then. These reports must be investigated, and those responsible must be held accountable by an independent process.

We wish to unequivocally remind the international community, however, that no international crime justifies the perpetration of another. We urge Israel to immediately cease its bombardment of Gaza and its mass displacement of Palestinians. Impartial processes to ensure justice, support and full reparations to all victims and accountability for the crimes perpetrated should be guaranteed.

We echo calls for a permanent ceasefire and emphasise the glaring absence of women's voices in the negotiations. The meaningful inclusion of women in the conflict resolution and recovery process is non-negotiable, in accordance with obligations to ensure non-discrimination and Security Council Resolution 1325.

We wish to remind all parties to the conflict and all States and other actors that international human rights law applies even in times of conflict and occupation and that the destruction caused by war is multi-generational. All parties must urgently use all means at their disposal to end the gross violations of women's and girls' rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, as the failure to do so will have a devastating lasting impact.

ENDS

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