



PERMANENT
OBSERVER MISSION OF
PALESTINE
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

115 EAST 65TH ST.
NEW YORK NY 10021

TEL 212 288 8500

FAX 212 511 8377



Statement by Ms. Nadya Rasheed, Counsellor, before the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-second Session, 3 March 2008: (Please Check Against Delivery)

My delegation is honored to address this Commission and would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chair, and the other members of the Bureau on your election; we pledge our full support and cooperation. In the same spirit, my delegation would also like to extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his report concerning the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2006/4) and to express our gratitude to ESCWA and to all the entities of the United Nations system for all of their efforts in providing much-needed assistance to Palestinian women.

Mr. Chairman,

This year marks the 40th year that the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, have been living under Israel's military occupation. The results have been tragic, with the very fabric of Palestinian society being shredded with each passing day of this longest occupation in modern history.

Every aspect of Palestinian life has been gravely and negatively impacted by the occupation. The society's functioning and the ability of its members to develop, advance and progress has been totally undermined by the occupying Power's oppressive and destructive policies. In this regard, the toll of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory on Palestinian women and their families has been vast. It has placed a huge burden on women, who struggle daily to ensure the well-being of their families in the face of formidable challenges. Palestinian women, just like all women, yearn to protect their children and families and to provide for them with a nurturing, secure environment in which to live and grow. Regrettably, for Palestinian women, this is an all too difficult task due to the illegal and brutal policies and practices of the occupying Power.

In reality, there is no normalcy of life for a people who are not free and whose basic human rights are systematically denied under foreign occupation. It is not normal to stand for hours at racist, humiliating checkpoints in your own land waiting for the privilege to go to market to buy food for your family. It is not normal to give birth at a checkpoint because you are not permitted to travel to a hospital. It is not normal to watch your children wither from malnutrition, anemia and disease as unemployment continues to rise and your family remains bereft of any source of income, sinking deeper into poverty and becoming totally dependent on food aid. It is not normal to fear for your children's lives every single day as they make their way through mazes of walls, military checkpoints, roadblocks and gates trying to get to school and home again. And, it is not normal to live in constant terror, fearing for your safety and that of your family, while fighter planes, tanks and helicopters routinely raid and assault civilian areas, bringing more death, destruction and trauma to your people.

Mr. Chairman,

Palestinian women continue to face a unique and tragic situation that continues to require the attention of the international community. In addition to their ongoing national struggle to realize their

P R E S S R E L E A S E

inalienable human rights they continue to fight alongside the women of the world against gender inequality, violence, including domestic violence, and discrimination so that they too can play an active role in their own society. While the advancement of women is an issue of Palestinian concern and the Palestinian Authority has established a Ministry for Women's Affairs to focus on priority issues in this regard, the reality is that the Israeli occupation and its unlawful policies and measures remain the major obstacle to their social, economic and political advancement.

Israel's military assaults, violent incursions and raids on civilian areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continue to seriously threaten the safety and well-being of Palestinian women and their families and hundreds have suffered death, injury and trauma as a result in the past year. The wanton destruction wreaked by the occupying Power on Palestinian homes and properties for the purpose of expanding its illegal settlements and its expansionist Wall, has caused the displacement and homelessness of thousands of Palestinian women and their families. The continuous collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population by Israel, whether by closures, restrictions on movement or other illegal punitive measures, affects all aspects of Palestinian women's lives and their abilities to care for their families, to contribute positively to their society and to advance.

The situation in the Gaza Strip in particular is dire. There, the entire Palestinian population continues to endure rising hardships as they remain besieged in an open-air prison, all crossings into and out of which continue to be inhumanely closed for prolonged periods of time, seriously exacerbating the humanitarian crisis that has prevailed for years. Poverty is rife, with 90% of the population living under the poverty line and 1.1 out of 1.4 million people dependent on food hand-outs. The international community must demand that Israel, as they occupying Power, abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law towards the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and must not absolve it of its responsibilities in this regard, especially in light of the deadly rampage unleashed by Israel against the Palestinian people over the past few days which has resulted in the cold-blooded killing of scores of civilians, including children and women.

Mr. Chairman,

It seems almost impractical to speak of any real progress regarding the situation of Palestinian women, and even more so to address this year's theme of "financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women", when not only women, but the entire Palestinian population, is denied the most basic human rights, such as food, education, adequate housing and the right to basic health. How can we talk of real progress when today's women of Gaza are without electricity for more than 8 hours a day, without clean water, cooking fuel and basic food supplies? And, how can there be any positive progress for that matter when the sanctity of human life continues to be blatantly disregarded by Israel?

Mr. Chairman,

It must be reiterated that there is no military solution to the conflict. The only way to bring about peace and security for both parties is through a process that will finally bring an end to the Israeli occupation and allow for the materialization of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem, as its capital, wherein Palestinian women can work side by side, in equality, with Palestinian men in promoting the development and advancement of the Palestinian society. But, for this to become a reality Israel, the occupying Power, must cease its illegal policies and practices, which continue unabated, and must genuinely embark on the path to peace. Only when this happens will Palestinian women be able to pursue their seemingly remote hopes of self-determination and enjoy the securities of a promising and empowering life for themselves, their children and for the generations to come.