



# Impacts of the Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Women

December 2017

# Impacts of the Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Women

**This study was undertaken by:** Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD)

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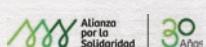
## Technical Coordination

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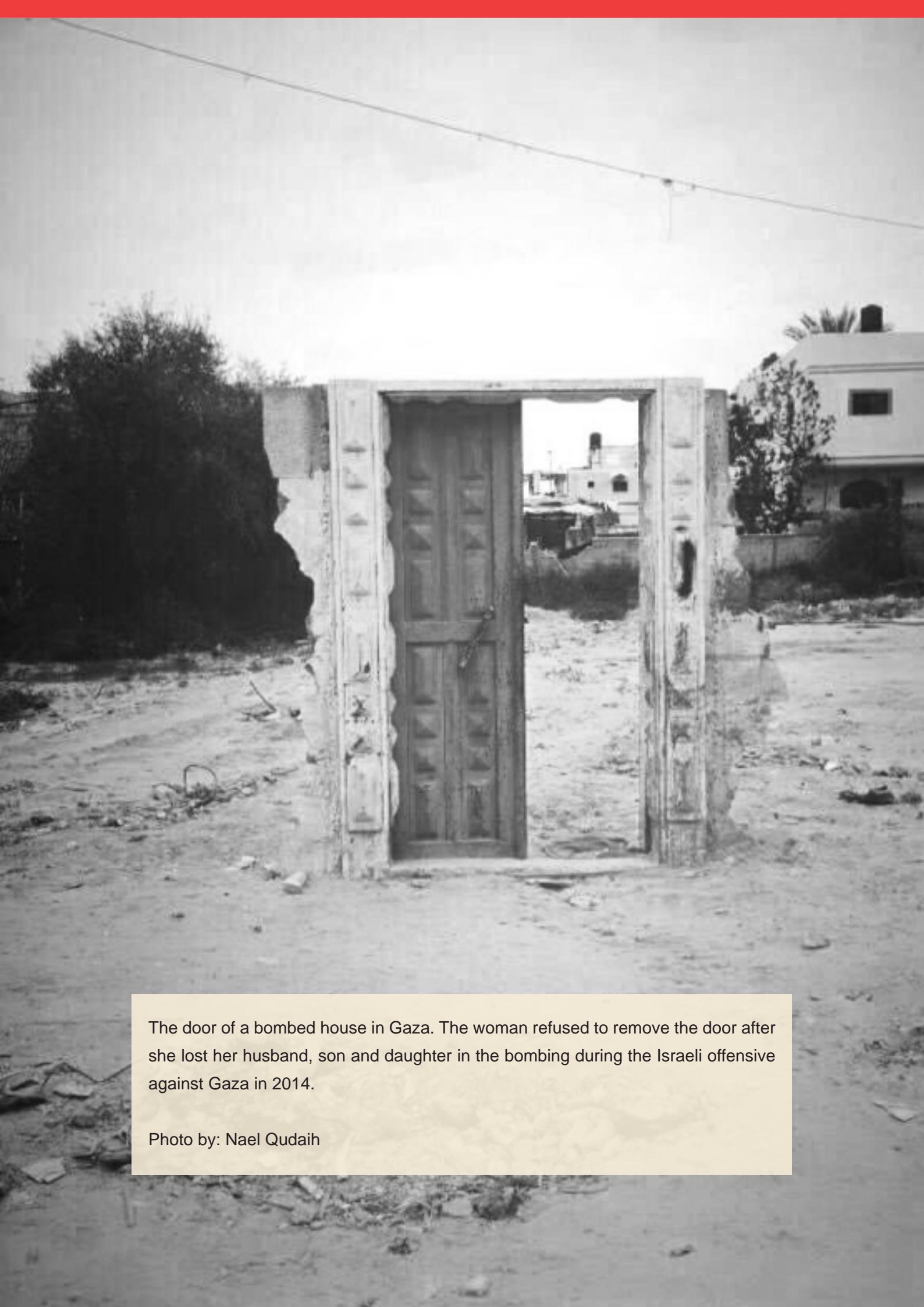
This advocacy report is accompanied by a video that documents the experiences of Palestinian women under Israeli military occupation. The video is available at the following link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_zzJoAg2h7k&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zzJoAg2h7k&feature=youtu.be)

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The door of a bombed house in Gaza. The woman refused to remove the door after she lost her husband, son and daughter in the bombing during the Israeli offensive against Gaza in 2014.

Photo by: Nael Qudaih

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# List of abbreviations

<b>AA</b>	ActionAid
<b>AHLC</b>	Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of the United Nations
<b>AICS</b>	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>APS</b>	Alianza por la Solidaridad
<b>AWRAD</b>	Arab World for Research and Development
<b>CAT</b>	The Convention Against Torture
<b>CESR</b>	Center for Economic and Social Rights
<b>CFTA</b>	The Culture and Free Thought Association
<b>EJ</b>	East Jerusalem
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>ICAHD</b>	The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>IHL</b>	International Humanitarian Law
<b>IHRL</b>	International Human Rights Law
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>IVGC</b>	Fourth Geneva Convention
<b>MFIs</b>	Micro Finance Institutions
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PA</b>	Palestinian Authority
<b>PBC</b>	Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>PCBS</b>	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>SCR</b>	Security Council Resolution
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UNISPAL</b>	The United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine
<b>WATC</b>	Women Affairs Technical Committee

# Introduction

Palestinian women have suffered myriad abuses at the hands of the Israeli Occupation, all of which have affected their behavior, their resilience and their lives. These hardships extend beyond the physical impact of the military occupation and influence the intimate details of their daily lives. The voices of these women are silenced and their suffering is made invisible by multi-layered patriarchy and violence. The list of occupation-related violations against Palestinian women is a long one. Participants in focus groups and in-depth interviews cited the killing of Palestinian women during the past three wars against Gaza; killing of Palestinian women at checkpoints in the West Bank; beating of women in protests against the Occupation; illegal abduction and imprisonment of women and young girls; denial of women's access to health care providers; as well as harassment, hate crimes, and sexual violence faced by Palestinian women who work in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank as some of the most grave violations.

Occupation-related violence and patriarchal gender roles are, in many cases, mutually-reinforcing. The denial of mobility by the Occupation creates conditions that intensify the vulnerability of women and young girls. One particularly poignant example is the cessation of schooling among girls, a decision taken by parents concerned about their daughters' security when crossing Israeli military roadblocks or confronting harassment by settlers. Further, the exposure of men to various types of occupation-related violence increases the scope and scale of traumatic reactions, which, in some instances, metastasizes into retaliatory violence against women.<sup>1</sup> One of the most egregious cases of occupation-related violence cited by participants was of a woman losing her own life and the life of her newborn child at an Israeli military roadblock. Women working in illegal settlements are especially vulnerable to harassment and multi-layered domination, as they lack legal and social protection. These concerns prompt families to become more protective and, reflecting this attitude, the opportunities for women to seek education, work and social services become even more limited.

This report presents the testimonies of Palestinian women with the aim of illuminating the experience of living in a violent, colonial, militarized and patriarchal environment. This report also illustrates the strength of Palestinian women and their ability to resist and rise from the ashes.

<sup>1</sup> Quantitative data collected by AWRAD with the What Works network (2017) show a direct relation between exposure to occupation violations and perpetration of violence against women and girls (unpublished report). Qualitative analysis illustrates such a relation; for more on the relation between occupation violations and perpetration of violence against women, please refer to: Nader Said, Reem Ziad-Ghattas, Nicholas Herbert Hyman, Mohammad Shuaibi, Violence against Women and Girls in the occupied Palestinian territory (Formative Research). AWRAD, Ramallah. 2017.

# Research objectives

The Culture and Free Thought Association, ActionAid and Alianza por la Solidaridad have jointly commissioned the study on the impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian women living in occupied Palestine. The purpose is to highlight the barriers, limitations, violations of rights and severe daily constraints endured by women. The objective of the research is, through in-depth and rigorous study, to provide a solid base of evidence, capable of challenging the mainstream narrative and the misrepresentation of Palestinians generally and Palestinian women particularly. It remains crucial to document, from a gender perspective, the injustices and oppressions suffered by women and their families, and to highlight the profound failure of international governments to live up to their obligations in relation to the Israeli Occupation, specifically: to protect the occupied population.

The research focuses on the following, interlinked components:

- Safety and security risks and threats, including the violence perpetrated against women (gender-based violence [GBV]), the restrictions imposed on women's freedom of movement, and the forced displacement of families, as direct consequences of the Israeli Occupation/blockade-related policies and systematic discrimination, as perpetrated by the Israeli military, settlers and government.
- Extent and consequences of the occupation-imposed discriminatory socio-economic policies directed at women accessing basic services (health, education, water, etc.) and deterrents to earning a living and accessing market/professional/economic life opportunities/civic, political and all forms of participation.

# Background and context

## Israel's military occupation of Palestine

During the late 19th and early 20th century, the displacement of Palestinians from their historic homeland began. Around 150,000 Palestinians were arbitrarily displaced during the British Mandate, a period of British administration of Palestine, spanning the years from 1922 to 1948. This period witnessed the physical and legal implementation of the Balfour Declaration, issued in 1917, which granted explicit recognition and support for the idea of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine through immigration and colonization (OCHA, 2007).

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted Resolution 181(II), which called for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, a plan adopted against the wishes of a majority of the indigenous population. This was immediately followed by the mobilization of Zionist armed militias and demonstrations against the partition plan by Arab Palestinians (Badil, 2004). With the onset of the Civil War in Mandatory Palestine and the subsequent 1948 Arab-Israeli War, more than 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced between late 1947 and the first half of 1949. To the Palestinian people, this event is called the Nakba or Catastrophe. (Badil, 2004).

Almost two decades later, in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, another 430,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced. Israel occupied Arab East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip in Palestine, the Golan Heights in Syria and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Since then, Palestinian refugees have lived in perpetual displacement from their homeland (OCHA, 2007). An estimated five million Palestinians have registered with, and are eligible for the services of, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN body responsible for the affairs of Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2017). Currently almost 42 percent of Palestinians living in the State of Palestine are refugees; this includes 26 percent of the population of the West Bank and 68 percent of the population of Gaza (PCBS, 2016).

Palestinians continue to endure forcible displacement at the hands of Israels occupation and colonial policies. The ongoing displacement, dispossession, and denial of the right to self-determination of the Palestinians, has led the UN Special Rapporteur to the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2006, John Dugard, to call the Palestinians an “endangered people” (UNISPAL, 2006).

2017 marks the 69th anniversary of the Palestinian catastrophe, better known as Nakba, and the 50th anniversary of the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Currently, 4.8 million Palestinians are living under the Israeli Occupation; one out of every four Palestinians living in the occupied territory is an UNRWA-registered refugee and 1.2 million people are living in refugee camps in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2016).

Reviewing the events of the past 70 years, it is unlikely that Israel will abandon, change or restrain its occupation policy. In fact, current trends appear to augur a harsher and more violent occupation. Since 1967, Israel has annexed thousands of dunums of Palestinian land, declared the Gaza Strip a “hostile entity”, imposed a land, air and sea blockade on Gaza since 2007, and applied the disruptive geographic divisions of the Oslo Accords, which fragmented the West Bank into scattered and disconnected enclaves with varying legal, political and economic conditions<sup>2</sup>.

The adverse effects of the Israeli military occupation of Palestine have been wide ranging, reflecting the various forms of violence and discrimination exercised through military and policy protocols. These include, for example, the expansion of illegal settlements in Palestinian territory and confiscation of land and natural resources for this purpose; displacement from and destruction of homes; physical attacks by soldiers and settlers; separation from family due to discriminatory policies and separation of families due to the Separation Wall (UN Women, 2016).

Furthermore, a 2005 report by Amnesty International highlighted the many negative impacts of the Israeli Occupation on the lives of Palestinian women; the most egregious included: women in labor being prevented passage through checkpoints and denied access to health care providers, resulting in them giving birth at checkpoints; women losing their agricultural work due to land confiscations and restrictions on land development and use; school girls harassed, threatened, and searched on their way to and from schools; abduction, imprisonment, and ill-treatment of Palestinian female detainees in Israeli detention centers; as well as violence against women by Palestinian men in their lives (Amnesty International, 2005). More recent reports point to the continuation and intensification of these violations. For example, a UN report (2012) cites the series of Israeli laws to expel and restrict Palestinians from Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>. The UN (2015) reports on the many forms of violations and argues that *“Restrictions on movement and access, increased illegal settlement expansion and settlers violence, demolitions of Palestinian infrastructure and displacement, the fragmentation of the territory and the closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, continue to have a negative gender differentiated impact on the lives of Palestinian women and their families.”*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreed to the temporary division of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) into three areas: A, B and C. This division was intended to last until a final status agreement was reached within five years. When Israeli/Palestinian negotiations collapsed in 2000, approximately 36 percent of the West Bank had been categorized as Areas A and B which primarily encompassed the built-up areas, leaving the majority of the West Bank – over 60 percent - with virtually all its future development potential - in Area C. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was endowed with most governmental powers in Area A; Israel retained security control of Area B and transferred civilian matters to the PA, while Area C was placed under full Israeli civilian and security control. Of particular importance is the fact that the responsibility for planning and zoning in Area C, including the issuance of building permits for construction, which was to be transferred to the PA by the end of 1998, has remained with Israel.

<sup>3</sup> UN, 2012. Impact of Israeli Occupation on Housing, Health Care, Employment for Palestinian Women and Youth. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/gapal1234.doc.html>

<sup>4</sup> UN, The Mission of the State of Palestine to the UN, 2015. Fact Sheet: The State of Palestine’s Women Under occupation. <http://palestineun.org/fact-sheet-the-state-of-palestines-women-under-occupation/>

Women are especially affected under occupation and in conflict and post-conflict settings. The UN Platform for Action (1995) describes how girls and women, because of their unequal status in society and their sex, are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict (UN, 1995). Palestinian women are no exception, and all suffer disproportionately from the structural violence of the Israeli Occupation due to their gender. Further, gender-related challenges suffered by women are severely worsened and exacerbated by the Occupation.

The Occupation plays a disruptive role in shaping the dynamics of gender needs, relations, roles and perceptions in Palestinian society. Its impacts are direct and indirect, as well as visible and invisible. The prevalent inequalities between men and women in Palestine are amplified, accentuated, and aggravated by new inequalities that are created by the Israeli Occupation.

For example, the geographic division and movement restrictions of the Palestinian population leads to women becoming intimidated into not traveling or pressed by their families to stay at home, which has an adverse effect on their social lives, access to health, educational attainment, and work opportunities. In addition, the escalating conservative attitudes and the idea that the lack of security is especially perilous for young women leads to the all-too-common response of early marriage (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2012).

## Failure of the international community

Despite repeated UN resolutions calling for its end, the Israeli occupation of Palestine continues. It has been noted by legal specialists that, although the Israel-Palestine issue has contributed abundantly to the corpus of international law, the victims of this conflict have received few of the benefits one might expect from such a scale of contributions (UN Women, 2016).

The international, institutional interventions in Palestine have been focused on the immediate and service-oriented impacts of the Israeli Occupation. This is perhaps reflective of the fact that the protection regime under international humanitarian law (IHL) is premised on the presumably temporary nature of military occupations. However, the Israeli Occupation has proved to be everything but temporary (UN Women, 2016). Such recognition serves to underscore the fact that the international community has failed the Palestinian people in its responsibility to: (1) hold Israel accountable for its legal obligations as an occupying power and (2) play an effective role in bringing the Occupation of Palestine to an end.

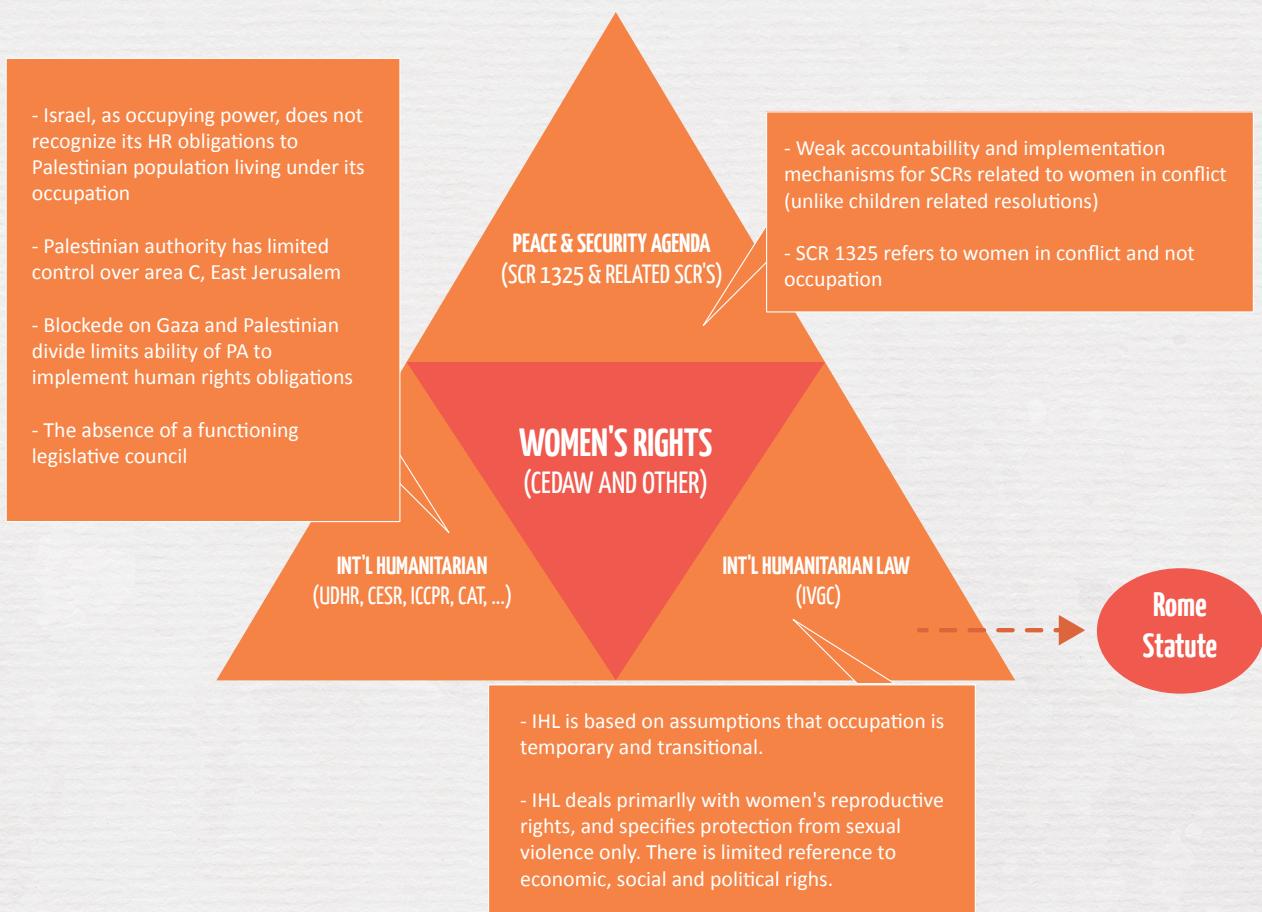
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*"All aspects of women's lives are impacted by the Israeli Occupation, and although it might seem that the reason is social and private, but, in reality, it is the Occupation that is the main reason for complicating women's lives."*

*(Palestinian Feminist, In-depth Interview, Gaza)*

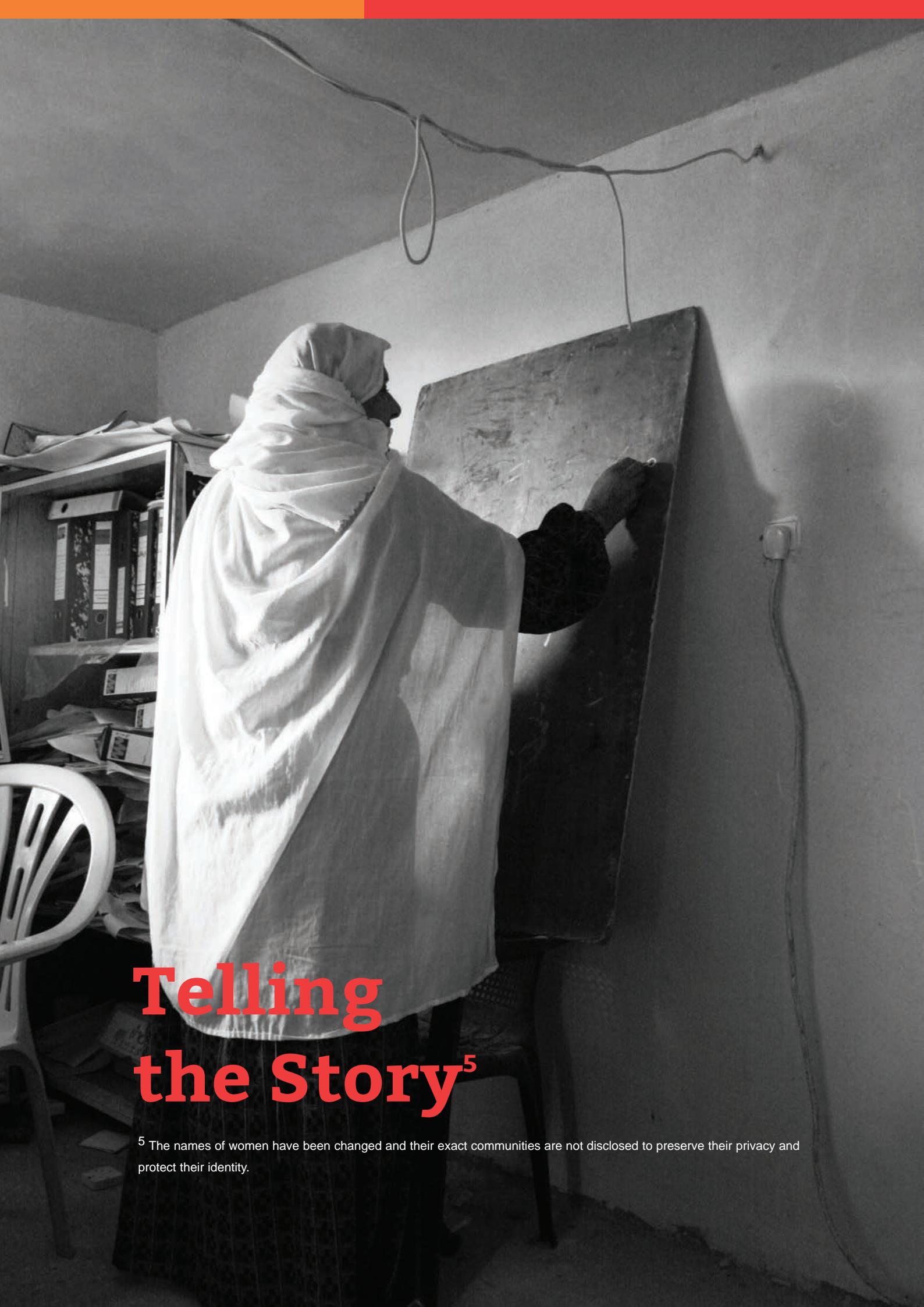
that impinge, threaten, and deny Palestinian women's rights, as a result of the prolonged Israeli Occupation. The figure summarizes these challenges as they relate to UN Security Council resolutions, IHL, and International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

**Figure (1):** Key challenges that impinge, threaten, and deny Palestinian women's rights under the state of prolonged Israeli Occupation.



(Source: UN Women, 2016)

Unlawful killings, targeting of civilians, administration of collective punishment and other deliberate actions have led several investigators and reporters to conclude that Israel has violated international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The following figure illustrates the key challenges



# Telling the Story<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The names of women have been changed and their exact communities are not disclosed to preserve their privacy and protect their identity.

# Analytical framework

Articulated by a 48-year-old woman from the Jordan Valley, a territory designated as Area C and under full Israeli control, the above-mentioned statement summarizes the complex nature of gender relations under occupation, where women must juggle the demands of traditional social roles and cultural norms, an unpredictable economic landscape and the prolonged, overarching occupation.

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The following pages are a presentation of the experiences and views of focus group participants and interviewees. This report communicates the voices, experiences, actions, sighs, and hopes of Palestinian women. The complex forms of human rights violations experienced, and resilience demonstrated, will be revealed in the context of a broader gender analysis. Such analysis will uncover the interconnectedness between occupation-related violations, social and economic conditions, as well as the overall legal and institutional context. Analyzing it from a gender perspective will also provide linkages between the public sphere (economic and social policies and access to public resources), the private sphere (the household) and the overarching reality of the Israeli Occupation (the key factor in limiting personal and collective opportunities for empowerment and progress). Overall, a feminist approach to gender analysis will allow us to highlight the complex nature of actions and reactions within the prevailing context and to reveal the active agency of women and their responses to the dual nature of discrimination (cultural and occupation-related).

”

*"Jumping from one vicious cycle to another is the story of my life; overcoming hurdles at home, discrimination at work and harassment in the street, then finding out that we all are, women and men, surrounded by the Occupation. How do you sort out your victimization (the enemy at home and the enemy in the background) and how do you become inventive to empower yourself and transcend? Somehow, we persevere."*

*(Woman participant, In-depth Interview, Jordan Valley)*

# **Occupation violations of human rights: The voices of women**

Occupation-related violations are varied and, to some extent, well covered in the documentation of human rights and media organizations.<sup>6</sup> In the following narrative, we cite violations that illustrate the experiences of Palestinian women and their coping strategies, as well as their relation to gender roles and women's rights. The following real-life experiences demonstrate that women do not face singular violations. In most cases, they face a combination of interlinked violations. The analysis provides not only an approximation of the impact of occupation violations on women and their loved ones, but also an analysis of women's coping mechanisms and the impact of these violations on their gender roles and rights.

## **1. War, loss, trauma and continuity**

### **1.1 Coping with human loss:**

Under the prevailing circumstances of vulnerability, a feeling of safety becomes a remote aspiration. Left behind, after losing almost every member of her family, Maysoun (26, Bachelor of Arts [BA] in Social Science) wondered if she would be able to overcome her personal grief, trauma, and real-life challenges. Like many women, Maysoun had to internalize and come to terms with loss and take responsibility for additional, more-demanding traditional roles, with justified anxiety and fear for the future.

<sup>6</sup>Please refer to Annex 2: Bibliography for a list of available sources of information.

Box (1)

## Loss of life under occupation



**Between 2000 and February 2017:  
9,000 Palestinians were killed**

Palestinians are subject to ongoing threats to their lives and physical safety from occupation-related violence, policies and practices. Between 2000 and February 2017, 9,000 Palestinians were killed by the Occupation, including 587 women and 1,996 children (Btselem, 2017a)

The most recent violent instance of continuous onslaught was the Israeli offensive against Gaza – codenamed Operation Protective Edge – launched in 2014. 2,251 Palestinians were killed, including 1,462 civilians. The dead included 551 children and 299 women. (UN OCHA, 2015).

She remembers how well she got along with her family. Unmarried and living with her family, she was keen on revealing her main source of hope and inspiration - her parents:

*"My father and mother were so proud of me and they always prayed for me. They were my rock and encouraged me to get my university degree."*

heavy sadness, she recounts the event that changed her life forever:

*"Making sure that my uncle and his wife have food, I took some food to them; they live nearby. As I was at their door, an Israeli F16- launched a missile at our house; my parents, sisters, brothers, sisters-in law and their children lived in the compound. In one second, I lost 26 members of my family; every one of them with the exception of my brother and a -3year old nephew. It felt like doomsday; an earthquake rocked our house, our life and our hope. With my uncle, the neighbors, I ran back to the house; we couldn't see anything but dust; very quickly, silence prevailed. I called each one of them by name: 'Where are you?' Only torn bodies were surfacing. For others, we had to wait for the heavy machinery of the Civil Defense."*

As someone who was surrounded by the love of her family, and dedicated to them in turn, Maysoun is finding it challenging to move forward, and more than three years after the murder of her family, she is still clinging to the memories of her earlier life. In addition, she expresses feelings of guilt over surviving while her family perished. Until recently, she felt that she should deny herself the joys of life, refraining from attending social gatherings and special occasions. She hesitated in pursuing a marriage with her fiancé, and, though she did eventually marry, she expresses reluctance to enjoy her new marriage. Having said that, Maysoun is trying to find reason to continue and persevere. Expected by society to nurture and take care of other family members, she took over the responsibility of supporting the two members of her family who survived the tragedy:

*"I had to keep myself sane, so that I could take care of my three-year old nephew who continues to ask for his mother. I am taking over the role of his late mother. My brother is depressed and unable to cope so I have to be there for him. I am using my limited education in psychology to help both of them. I searched for a wife for my brother; this would help him in coping and would relieve me from full responsibility. We finally found someone who is taking care of him now; he has a child and that is helping him cope."*

While keen on helping her brother recover from his depression, Maysoun, as a woman, felt guilty about getting married and transitioning to her new life with her husband. Yet, she was encouraged by close relatives and friends to get married:

*"I didn't want to get married to my fiancé. He is nice and supportive, but I felt bad marrying while my parents are under the soil. I felt that I must support others and I am expected to do so. Eventually, I got married and had a child who is now the light of my life. I want to continue living for him. I want to make sure that he grows safe and in peace. I am already worried about losing him in another war."*

Maysoun reports receiving emotional and material support from her extended kin, neighbors and friends. But she is yet to find healing from within or feel able to fully support herself. In fact, the entangled factors of the war, the occupation-imposed economic crisis, her new role caring for her remaining siblings, in addition to her own son, all contributed to the reinforcement of her traditional gender role and limited her chances for change.

*"I am going through the motions; doing what I am expected to do, but I am utterly unhappy. I don't want to be happy. One day, I might heal but I will never forget. While my friends are supportive, I am not receiving any psychological support from any specialized institution; the ones that exist are not qualified to help me. With all the responsibilities of taking care of my family members, my husband and my child, and with no jobs for me in Gaza, I had to stay home and sometimes do embroidery to partially support my family."*

## 1.2 Child female victims

Women who never received an opportunity to complete their university education find comfort in ensuring that their daughters are well educated. Working hard to bring income to the family and ensuring that her six daughters and one son enjoyed a dignified life, Azza (43) worked from home in baking and embroidery to provide income for her family. Before her five daughters were killed, she had seven children. The killing of her daughters and her own injuries, along with the demolition of her house and displacement, left her with physical, psychological and emotional scars that will last forever. In addition, such a devastating event posed real challenges and set in motion a chain reaction that further disempowered her. Azza had two objectives in life: (1) to educate her daughters and (2) to ensure that her family lived in dignity without need for others:

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*"I wanted my daughters to get the best education; educated girls run the world. With my husband, we worked very hard to have a roof above our heads. The 27th of December 2009 was a turning point in our life. I could hear my husband scream, asking me to wake up; he truly felt that we are dead and that we are talking to each other from the other world. It was dark and silent. Our house was shelled and I had ruins all over me; I struggled to remove it and started looking for my two-week old daughter and my one-and-a-half-year old who were with me in the same room. I found them under the rubble; they were injured but survived. I ran to find my five daughters in the other room; I couldn't do anything; the cement blocks and the dust were all over the place. I was taken to the hospital as I sustained injuries in my eye, leg and spine; I still have shrapnel in my back. I knew that my daughters didn't survive, but I was hoping that was not true. I looked for them around the corridors of the hospital; everyone was screaming and running. They called me to say goodbye to my daughters: I said goodbye to the first, I said goodbye to the second, I said goodbye to the third...then I passed out. In my close-to-death experience, I saw my other two daughters alive, but when I woke up I had to say goodbye to them as well."*

Painful experiences are not isolated from their lasting influence on women and gender relations:

”

*"I am unable to work now and my husband lost his sense of being. Instead of me working to sustain the family, now, with my injuries and need for surgeries, I can't really do anything. I couldn't bear the loss of my daughters; I thought maybe having more children would help me. I had two more, I love them but I am still in mourning. More mouths to feed, but less power to work. I also felt that I must be more religious than before; maybe I was not close enough to God. So, I decided to save any money that I got to go on the pilgrimage; maybe God will help me recover. My husband is now living in his own world, depressed and violent. My son has scars all over his body; I am not sure how he will survive when people only look at him with pity."*

Support for families that endure loss is fragmented and inconsistent. In some cases, reliance on assistance becomes an alternative to work (which for many cannot be obtained because of high unemployment):

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*"We receive support money from the government and some help from a charitable organization. UNRWA helped me with rent for six months; then we re-built our house with support from a fund dedicated to such a purpose. I hope no one in the world has to face the pain that I am facing; I don't need money, I just need my daughters back."*

## 1.3 War and loss of source of livelihood

The vast majority of Palestinians living in Gaza must cope with high rates of poverty and unemployment. Economic hardship is not easily shouldered, as there is little control over natural resources (including agricultural land near the Israeli border or fishing areas) and no control over exports and imports. Despite these obstacles, Palestinians continue working to improve their living conditions. This is especially challenging when the male breadwinner of the household is unemployed and has few opportunities for finding work. Nabila is a mother of two children; she is the primary wage-earner in her family through her work running a successful poultry farm. However, her farm was completely destroyed during the 2014 War on Gaza:

”

*"My husband didn't believe that I could establish and run a farm on our land near the border area. I challenged him and asked him to work with me on the farm, but he refused and insisted that I would fail. My farm became the most important one in our region; people came to visit to witness my success. But all of that changed when the Israelis invaded Gaza during 2014. We had to flee our home and land. We had to stay with friends in the south of Gaza; I felt uncomfortable, as we were imposing. After two weeks, I decided that we should go back, where I found that all of my plants, my chickens, my pigeons had perished. Half of my house was destroyed. I felt worse about my farm than about my house. It [the farm] gave me strength, I was powerful and I was able to feed my children and have dignity in my dealings with all others. The government compensated us for the house, but I am still searching for support to rebuild my farm. No one is really interested in building our economic lives."*

## Box (2)

# Female economic circumstances

The overall female unemployment rate in Gaza in the first quarter of 2015 was 59.6 percent, while the rate among female youth was 73.3 percent. (PCBS, 2015a)

Among females in Palestine, higher education is not correlated with higher employment. In 2016, 50.6 percent of women with 13+ years of schooling were unemployed. (PCBS, 2017a)



Almost one-third of female-headed households are food insecure, compared to one fourth of male-headed households in Palestine.  
(PCBS, 2016)

In 2016, micro-finance institutions (MFIs) in Palestine have an outstanding portfolio of \$170 million, distributed across 73,000 borrowers, 38 percent of whom were women. (AICS, 2016)

## **2. Activism and resistance to settlements in Area C and East Jerusalem**

### **2.1 Imprisonment and continuation of resistance**

Palestinian activists who participate in non-violent resistance are subjected to continued harassment from the Israeli Occupation, including physical and verbal violence. Coming from a traditional community does not always mean that women conform to traditional roles, whether in the household or in the Struggle. The life of a woman participating in non-violent resistance activities requires a great deal of mobility and freedom to choose. Dina (29, BA Business Administration, employed, married and awaiting the birth of her first child) comes from a traditional community in the north of the West Bank where, as she says, she was expected to marry after high school, bear children, and play a very limited role, if any, in the Palestinian Struggle. Dina emphasizes how her way of thinking is consistent with the historic role in resisting occupation that has been played by Palestinian women across history. Residing near communities in Area C, each threatened by constant demolition and displacement, she decided to become actively involved. In her struggle, she faced a number of violations (cited in her testimony below) and had to adjust her activist tactics over time. Dina emphasizes the need to raise local and international awareness about the displacement of communities in Area C.

Dina's activism is essentially non-conformist and she recognizes the unique character of her lifestyle and position relative to others from a traditional community. She has to move from one region to another; she must stay the night outside of her family's house and meet with Palestinian and international activists who protest violations by Israeli settlers and Israeli soldiers. She observes a link between her self-empowerment and her political activism against the Occupation, which has allowed her to discover new opportunities to grow and transition into new fields of interest. Her participation in the Struggle opened up

greater opportunities for movement and exposure to other cultures:

”

*I was part of a Palestinian and international group of activists staying the night in a community threatened with demolition. The settlers erected a tent near ours to instigate confrontation, playing loud Hebrew music and making noises. Then, they placed a barbed wire fence around our tent. They carried heavy guns. They wanted to intimidate us so that we would leave. At some point, one of the settlers started tearing our tent apart and I decided to confront him. I didn't know where I got the courage to face him while he was carrying a gun and willing to shoot. One of the international solidarity activists came to help; the settler punched him very hard in the face and we had to take him to a hospital.*

Activism does not go unnoticed by the Israeli Occupation. Dina was arrested, tortured, attacked viciously by military dogs and harassed numerous times. After six months in Israeli prisons, including two months in isolation, Dina returned to her life, keen to continue her activism. She, however, took time to soul-search and determine what her next steps would be. Describing herself as “an independent soul,” she decided to move out of her parents’ house. She took a job with a media organization in the south of the West Bank, far away from her family. While this was a challenging decision to make in the context of her traditional community, she found support within her family. In fact, she remembers what her brother told her after her jail time:

”

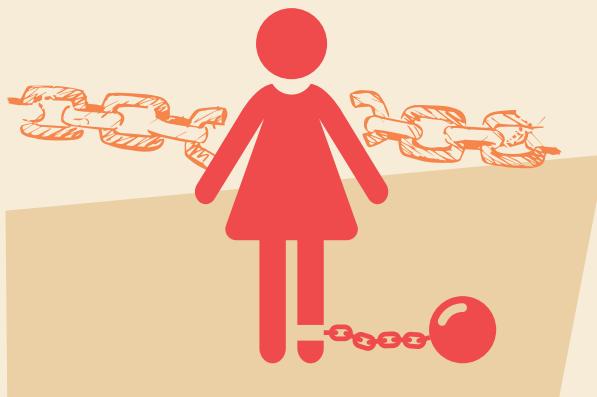
*“I will always remember and live up to what my brother told me; he said that the Occupation might demolish homes, put us in jail, cut our water supply, but it will only become real if it confiscates our will and occupies our souls. I keep living with that motto. Some young women find my actions to be brave, while others are not supportive.*

Box (3):

## Palestinian women political prisoners

As of March 2017, 65 Palestinian women are held in Israeli detention centers, including **12 minors**. Over the past 45 years, an estimated 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and/or detained under Israeli military orders.

The majority of Palestinian women detainees were subjected to psychological torture and ill-treatment by Israeli authorities, including sexual violence, beatings, insults, threats and body searches".



Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 2017

Resistance comes in various forms and Dina's experience is a model of resilience, flexibility and innovation. Moving forward with her life, Dina decided that she would resist the Israeli Occupation by raising awareness about the impacts and scars caused by its human rights violations. Her soul searching and independent spirit led her to discover a new calling, which fits her personal development:

”

*"I decided to learn theatre and I joined the "Theatre of the Oppressed" with Ashtar. Now I find an outlet for all my negative energy through rehearsals and share my positive energy with others through my acting on stage. I choose the theatre to resist the Occupation."*

Through theatre, she is working with younger women and showing that women can express their feelings and thoughts with strength. Coming from a traditional community and fighting for her rights, many young women look up to Dina as an inspiring role model.

#### Box (4):

## Israeli settlements

**140** Israeli government-sanctioned settlements and **100** settlement outposts have been established in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. Israel considers the former to be “legal” and the latter “illegal.” International humanitarian law considers both to be illegal. (OCHA, 2017).

**588,000** settlers live in the West Bank, with population growth at a rate of **4.1** percent in 2015, compared to **2** percent in Israel. Settlements are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention, as they involve the transfer of the population of the occupying power into the land of the occupied. (Btselem, 2017b)



On 6 February, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, approved the “Regularization Bill”, allowing the retroactive legalization under Israeli law of settlements erected on private Palestinian land (OCHA, 2017).

In 2015, Yesh Din documented **135** incidents of ideologically-motivated offenses committed by settlers against Palestinians, including **58** incidents of violence and **39** incidents of damage to property. Of these, **27** took place inside Palestinian homes or communities, including **6** cases of arson or attempted arson of Palestinian homes while families were inside. (Yesh Din, 2017)

**Box (5):**

## Segregated roads



Illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank are well connected to each other and to Israeli cities. A network of settler-only roads, allowing Israelis free and unobstructed movement, links settlements, military areas and other infrastructure across the West Bank.

By contrast, Palestinian access is restricted by a massive closure regime. Physical obstacles such as the Separation Wall and checkpoints, and administrative requirements, particularly the permit regime, restrict Palestinian access and movement within the West Bank, particularly in the territories of East Jerusalem, areas

isolated by the Separation Wall (the Seam Zone), 'firing zones', the Israeli controlled area of Hebron city (H2), and land around or within Israeli settlements.

## 2.2 Activism and resistance in H2 area in Hebron

Over 40,000 Palestinians live in the old city of Hebron, a territory that was designated as H2 in 1997. The area is fully controlled by the Israeli military, which protects and facilitates the expansion of illegal settlements and allows the settlers to live at the expense of the Palestinian population. Women and children are disproportionately affected. Jihan has a home in the segregated area of H2; she is divorced with no children and holds a university degree in English literature. Jihan recognizes that her lifestyle is different than most of her neighbors.

### Box (6):

## The old city of Hebron (the H2 Area)

H2 is the Israeli-controlled area inside the Palestinian city of Hebron. It includes four illegal Israeli settlement compounds, occupied by a few hundred Israeli settlers, protected by 2,000 - 4,000 Israeli military and a population of over 40,000 Palestinians. About 30 percent of the Palestinians living in the H2 area (approximately 12,000) reside in neighborhoods adjacent to the settlement compounds and are burdened by severe access restrictions (OCHA, 2017)

She works as the head of a kindergarten in the same area, is the sole breadwinner in her household and is also cognizant of her role as “the protector of the neighborhood.” Jihan, similar to residents in this area, cites countless instances of threats, intimidation, and outright violence, inflicted by the Israeli military and Israeli settlers. In this area, the alliance between the Israeli soldiers and the Israeli settlers is pronounced and verified by testimonies by human rights organizations, international observers and the media. To her, resisting the activities of the settlers and the actions of the Israeli military is a daily occurrence and must continue. Her most important priority is protecting the children of her kindergarten. She vividly retells an attack on her kindergarten, which is part of where she and her 83-year-old mother live:

”

*“Most of the children had left, but a few of them were waiting to be picked up by their parents. I could hear the settlers intimidating people immediately at my doorstep; I came out to the balcony and started videotaping. We must preserve evidence of their crimes. A couple of hours later, I had only one child left and I took him to stay with me and my mother. The soldiers and some settlers began viciously knocking at my door. When I came out, they immediately accused me of throwing stones at the settlers, which I vehemently denied. The soldier said that you must be afraid of me; I told him that I am afraid of no one but God. They searched my house without a warrant; my mother kept the child on her lap, comforting him. They eventually took me to the Israeli police center, at the entrance of the area where settlers live. They brought a soldier to testify that I threw stones; they brought a woman settler to say that I threw stones; I told them to their face that they are lying. The policeman started threatening me and asked that I pay 3,000 NIS as my charge and he asked me to sign a paper that I will not travel until my court day. I said that he is not a court and as such I will not pay the charge. They treated me like a criminal and the settlers were enjoying that. They kept me for six hours and threatened to bring my mother. I didn’t yield and I left home after they fingerprinted and photographed me. I knew that they will come back, but despite this, I will continue to stay in my house and open my kindergarten.”*

To Jihan, like many, their lives cannot be isolated from their surroundings. They must work with others to prevent and alleviate the violations. Women are especially active in rescuing children and youth who are exposed to settler violence. In doing so, they are accorded no due process when suffering abuses at the hands of the Israeli army or settlers. Jihan recalls an attack on a young boy in front of her house:

”

*“Sitting by myself at home, listening to classical music, I could hear the soldiers placing concrete roadblocks and beating and harassing the people passing by. I didn’t come out as this is almost a daily occurrence. One young boy was going to the Friday prayers and they started beating him up; they dragged him into my courtyard. I screamed at the soldiers and protested their violence towards the young boy. They continued and I approached them trying to save the boy from their violent attack. To convince them to leave him alone, I told them that he was my son, so that they stared beating me up in his place. They took the boy and I went to the Israeli police station to file a complaint. The policeman mocked me and laughingly asked me to come back tomorrow; he said: ‘We have too many cases today.’ I left, allowed the pain to take its toll on me and fainted. I was taken to the nearby clinic; I came back with more determination to stay.”*

### Box (7)

## Family unification



- ✓ In 1967, Israel declared the West Bank and Gaza closed areas, where movement in or out, particularly for Palestinians, must be approved by the military commander
- ✓ A census was held by the Occupation authorities, and every person over sixteen who did not present him or herself at the time was denied residency status in the Occupied Territory.

- ✓ Israel categorizes and classifies the Palestinian population into five main categories:
  - Palestinians with a West Bank identity card: Registered as permanent residents of the West Bank, following the 1967 Occupation by Israel.
  - Palestinian permanent residents of Jerusalem with an East Jerusalem ID card: Registered as being permanent residents of East Jerusalem after the 1967 Occupation and illegal annexation by Israel. These individuals hold the status of permanent resident (although residency can be revoked by Israeli authorities on the basis of several conditions, such as living outside the borders of the city).
  - Palestinians with Gaza Strip identity card: Registered in the Gaza Strip after the 1967 Occupation by Israel.
  - Palestinian citizens of Israel: Palestinians permanently residing within Israel and possessing Israeli citizenship.
- ✓ The Oslo Accords stipulated that the Palestinians must notify Israel of every change they make to the Population Registry and must receive Israeli approval to grant residency to spouses and children of Palestinian residents. However, after the year 2000, Israel froze the family unification process, and the Palestinian Authority has accumulated more than 120,000 requests.
- ✓ Israel also denies family unification to married Palestinian couples who hold different identification cards — for example, one with a West Bank or Gaza ID card and the other with an Israeli-issued East Jerusalem ID card or with Israeli citizenship.
- ✓ Israel's consistent position toward family unification was/is “a special act of compassion by the Israeli authorities,” rather than a vested right of Palestinians.

### **Human rights violations**

The Israeli laws and policies mentioned above violate Palestinians' fundamental human rights to equality, liberty, privacy and family life. Moreover, Israel has violated several fundamental principles of international law, incorporated in various conventions, which relate to the obligation of states to protect the rights of families, citizens and residents (Adalah, 2017):

- ✓ The right of every person, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, to marry and to establish a family.
- ✓ The family is defined as the natural basic unit of society, entitled to protection and assistance by the state. This protection is required especially at the time of the establishment of the family and as long as it is responsible for taking care of children.
- ✓ The prohibition on arbitrary or illegal invasion of the privacy of a person, or the arbitrary or illegal intervention in his or her family or home.

## 2.3 Activism and resistance in EJ

While Jihan is clinging to her house, in the midst of daily settlers' violence, many other women also face challenges in keeping their homes in the face of concerted efforts by the Israeli government. Palestinian women in East Jerusalem must devote enormous time and effort to protecting their homes from demolition, while keeping their families from breaking under the pressure of Israeli violations, as illustrated in the narrative below.

House demolition is compounded by other challenges that families face. Sama is an example of the coping and resilience that women demonstrate as they and their families face adversity. Sama is a working mother, in a family that lives in poverty; her husband is ill and therefore cannot work. For her, like most Jerusalemites, staying steadfast in the city is a continuous struggle in the face of discriminatory policies and double standards applied to Palestinians, as compared to Israeli settlers. House demolition is illegal and is a violation of human rights. It is carried out by the Israeli Occupation to drive Palestinians out of their homes especially in Jerusalem and Area C.

Sama is 54 years old and lives in the Silwan neighborhood of Jerusalem. With six children, she has been working as a janitor in a clinic to cover her family's expenses. Accused of throwing stones, her sons were arrested many times (when some were as young as 14). Sama herself was arrested by the Israeli Occupation a number of times for periods ranging from one to two weeks. Sama has had to deny her own needs to shoulder life's challenges. She explains:

“

*“My husband is ill and his role in the household is minimal. Every time I give birth I fall into deep depression, but I don't have the time to take care of myself. I must do the healing on my own. I am busy bringing income to the family, finding work for my children to help me cover our expenses. I must work very hard to keep them out of Israeli jails and when they are in jail, my burden is increased by seeing lawyers and having to visit them.”*

As a Palestinian living in Jerusalem, Sama must endure discrimination including continuous denial of a permit from the Israeli occupation authorities to build a house. In the absence of a permit from the Israeli military, the house she built was demolished with barely any notice from the authorities. In the course of the demolition process, she and her family members had to endure repeated and copious violence.

She had to cope with her new reality of one room and bathroom; all that remained after the Israelis demolished the rest of the house. The struggle to cope goes beyond finding support to reconstruct her house and extends to further discrimination (e.g. dealing with regular harassment by Israeli soldiers and municipal workers), challenges in the household (e.g. managing sleeping arrangements in such a small space and dealing with extra psychological pressures on her children) and additional roles that she must perform (e.g. looking for support to reconstruct her demolished house).



*I loved my house; everything in it was my decision. I designed the kitchen myself and they didn't even give me a chance to take cupboards and my beloved items. I started looking for support; I couldn't use any legal service as the Israeli authorities didn't give us much time. One organization supported us by offering to pay for renting another place. I tried, but I decided to return to my one-room house; it is my house after all. For the demolition of the house, the Israeli municipality keeps pressuring me to pay a very high amount of taxes and they also expect me to pay for services when they provide none. Now we all live in the same room. My children can't invite their friends over; I can't have my relatives over for visits. When my son got married, we had to put up a cloth cover in the yard outside to receive the guests. The authorities came and took it away and we had to do a wedding under the sun. The pressure of living in one room is mounting; my children are under great pressure leading them to fight amongst each other and use violence against each other. The boys don't trust anyone or the outside world; they insist on not allowing their sister to leave the house without them escorting her. Lately, I don't enjoy one minute of intimacy with my husband. To me: No love, no life.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> For more on the role of the occupation's actions on relations and birth patterns please refer to: Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015. THE POLITICS OF BIRTH AND THE INTIMACIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN OCCUPIED EAST JERUSALEM. British Journal of Criminology Advance Access published May 20, 2015.

Box (8):

## House demolition – A displacement policy



**42,000 Palestinian homes**

Since 1967, Israel has demolished over 42,000 Palestinian homes and other structures and continues to do so, on the basis of several illegal policies (ICAHD, 2016).

Various types of demolitions are carried out by the Israeli military, including «administrative» demolitions, where Palestinian homes have been built without Israeli-issued permits; punitive demolitions – where a family house is destroyed if a member is accused of being involved in militant activity; as well as destroying houses during military operations, as in the case of Gaza.

From the very outset of Israel's Occupation of the West Bank, it instituted a permit and planning regime, restricting and denying construction to Palestinians, while simultaneously facilitating establishment and construction of settlements by allocation of vast swathes of territory.

Demolitions for lack of building permits in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (2006-2017)



**1,829 demolitions**

Homes destroyed during Israel's military offensive on Gaza (2014) (Btselem, 2017c)



**18,000 homes destroyed or  
badly damaged**



**+ 8,007 displaced**



**+ 100,000 displaced**

Israel's demolition policies are illegal, and aim to expel Palestinians, build more settlements and reinforce the Separation Wall. (WATC, 2017). Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Occupying Powers are prohibited from destroying property or employing collective punishment. The following remarks by the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council highlight Israel's intentions:

”

*“The creation of new facts on the ground through demolitions and settlement building raises questions about whether Israel’s ultimate goal is, in fact, to drive Palestinians out of certain parts of the West Bank, thereby undermining any prospect of transition to a viable Palestinian state.” 18 April 2016<sup>8</sup>*

## 2.4 Resistance to land grabs in the South of Hebron

Under the Occupation, women strive to determine their own lives. Coming from a traditional, small village in the south of Hebron, a community under constant pressure from Israeli authorities and settlers, Somoud would not be dissuaded from going beyond traditional roles. Despite this, her life, as she describes it, is marred with occupation violations:

”

*“When I was 10, the Israeli Occupation forced us off our land; we kept trying to go back and only years later could we successfully claim our land. Once, after working for a whole season and immediately after we harvested the wheat crop, a 12-hour workday in the burning sun, the settlers burned all the wheat. As kids, we were exposed to attacks by the settlers as we walked to the nearby school. This was the time when I noticed the international solidarity person walking with us trying to provide us with protection. The settlers harassed me and the soldiers searched my school bag, but that only gave me more strength and determination, not only to empower myself against the Occupation but also against regressive customs and traditions. The violations continued and they are countless. But one event solidified my internal power and will to become tougher in my belief in my rights as a Palestinian and as a woman. The Israeli army came all of a sudden and started demolishing the mosque and the houses near our house; then came forward to my house, before I came out and resisted. I asked them for a written order, they didn’t provide one so I continued to protect my home. The soldier started hitting me and then sprayed me with tear gas. They eventually arrested me and took me to jail in Jerusalem. They tortured me in many ways. My family looked for me and the Israelis told them that I am in different places just to cause them more pain.”*

<sup>8</sup>UN General Secretary, Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East (18 April 2016). <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2016-04-18/secretary-generals-remarks-security-council-situation-middle-east>

Somoud, like many women, must face challenges due to her non-conforming gender role. Her challenges go beyond the Occupation:

**Box (9):**

## **Massafer Yatta**

Massafer Yatta is an area in the extreme south of the West Bank, located in the Hebron governorate. Across its territory, there are six distinct localities, composed of 19 hamlets, populated by roughly 1,500 Palestinians. Livelihoods are predominately agricultural.

Almost 20 years ago, Israel declared the area a closed military area, to make way for Firing Zone 918. Since the declaration of the firing zone, the Occupation has conducted regular demolitions of infrastructure, houses and entire villages, displacing hundreds of residents and driving them to seek shelter in the caves on the outskirts.

For the past 20 years, the inhabitants of Massafer Yatta have fought their expulsion through a series of legal means, winning victories in some cases and stalling demolition in others. However, regular demolitions have occurred, leading to home destruction and inhabitant displacement.

”

*“Girls in my community are married at 15. I insisted on finishing my university degree and after that I looked for work, all the while continuing my daily resistance to the Occupation as the guard of my family’s land. The old women across the road always asked me why don’t I stay home and stop embarrassing my family. My father supports me in my decision. If my father submitted to the customs, I wouldn’t be here now. Our community doesn’t enjoy health, education or any other basic services. We lost our house and had to live with my uncle. An international organization donated a caravan that we used, but the Israelis sent us a warning that they will demolish it. I am trying to find a job with the government but I don’t have the connections so I was denied a position. I am currently working to form a society that will work to protect the rights of people who live in the south of Hebron. Now, more women participate in protests against Israeli violations than men. Many come to me and say that I am their role model. We are not hungry, but we need political rights and protection. I went to Italy representing my community and they were shocked to see that Palestinian women are not as they are wrongly presented. They saw a powerful, articulate and persistent woman. In Italy, I felt so much freedom; I felt I own the streets and the skies, but I have no control in my homeland.”*

Box (10)

## The problem of child marriage



The median age of marriage for women in Palestine was 20.3 years in 2015

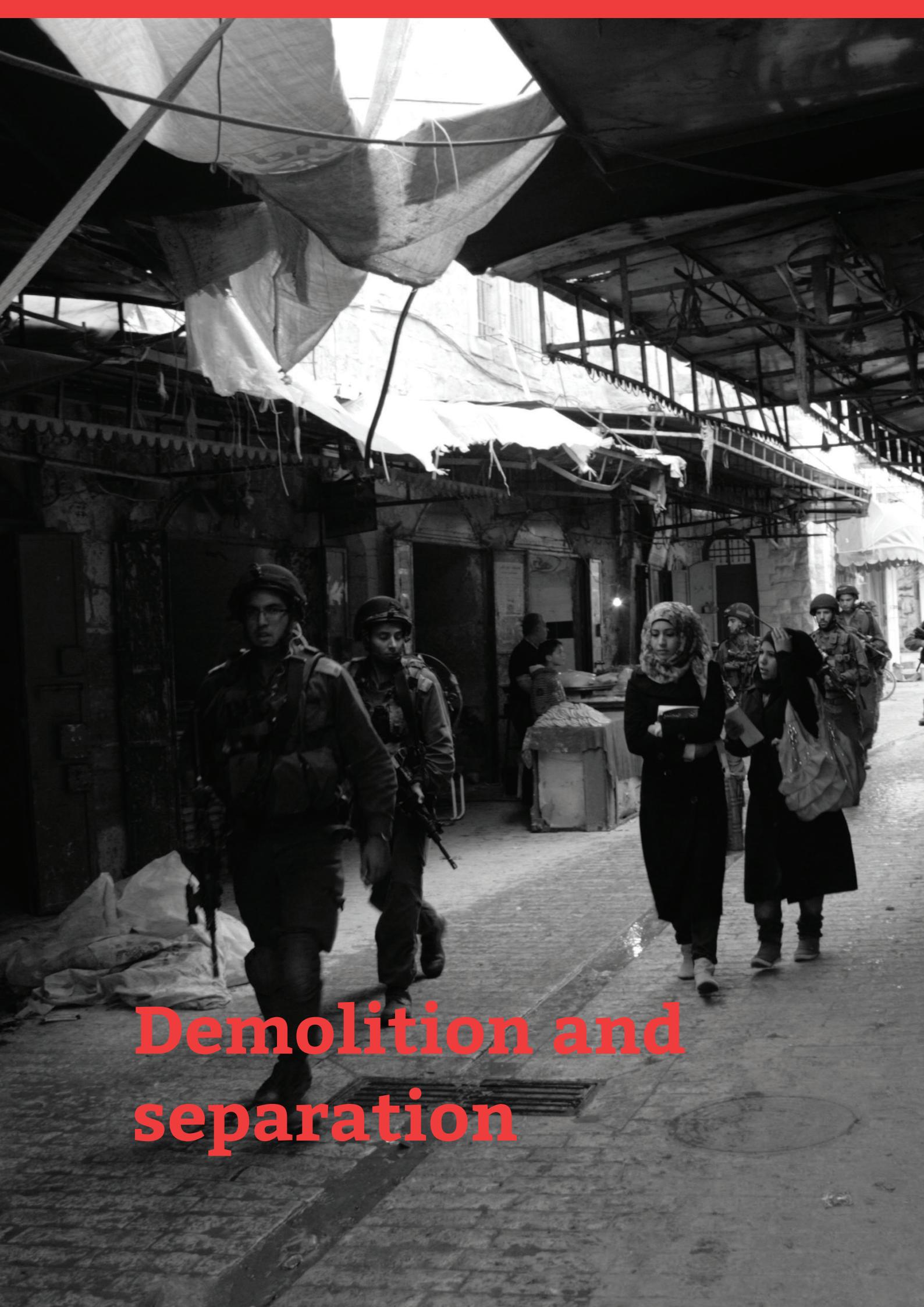


21.3 percent of marriages involved brides younger than 18 years old



42 percent of the total marriage contracts involved 19-15 year old females

(PCBS, 2015b)



# Demolition and separation

# 3. Demolition and separation

## 3.1 Demolition and family separation in Area C

The Israeli permit and planning regime continues to violate human rights and creates geographical separation/division of many families. This is accomplished not only through denial of family reunion requests in Jerusalem and the prohibition of family travel between the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, but also through house demolition. Laila lives in a community in Area C (under Israeli full control) in the Jordan Valley. Laila is a mother to seven children and is working as a maid for a Jewish family in a nearby settlement. Her life became more complicated when her house, where all of the family resided together in the same area, was demolished by the Israeli forces on the pretense that it did not have permission from the Israeli military authorities. The Israeli actions, in her case, are compounded by additional social factors, reflective of the stigma accorded to her work in the illegal settlement, which adds to the pressure she experiences:

”

*“When the Israelis demolished our house; we had no place to live as a family and were denied the right to re-build. My husband with four of my children had to move to his family’s house in a refugee camp in the Tulkarem region. I had to stay with three of my children in my family’s house. It is very difficult for a woman who is not educated to find any work in Palestinian institutions; I had to continue my work in the nearby settlement. I run between here and where my husband lives; sometimes he uses violence against the children so I must go immediately to deal with that. Violence against me didn’t only come from the Israelis. First I couldn’t find any help after my house was destroyed. I had to work very hard and under difficult conditions in the settlement to save money. When I saved enough, I built a new house on a communal plot of land, but this man from the community came and asked to move out of the house or pay him a big sum of money, claiming that the land is his. ... Once, he came and tried to evict me; he hit me on the head and I had to be hospitalized for two days. No one could protect me from him. A few days after the Israelis came and shattered my dream for this house. My family continues to be torn; I am a wife without husband and a mother to half of my children.”*

Box (11):

## Background on Area C



Area C covers 61 percent of the West Bank, over which Israel maintains full civil and military control.

Palestinians are not allowed to draft development plans or develop Area C.

Approximately 300,000 Palestinians live across 532 communities, with precarious access to land, water, and vital services such as education and health.

Building is only allowed by Israeli military permit, which is rarely issued. During the first half of 2016, only 91 permits, out of 428 total applications, were approved.



The absence of permits leads Palestinians to risk building without approval in order to accommodate a growing family, but such 'illegal' structures are subject to Israeli demolition orders. In 2016:

**12,500** outstanding demolitions

**1,093** structures in Area C and East Jerusalem were demolished or confiscated

**1,600** In the course of 2016, 1,600 people were displaced, more than half of them children.

## **Growing gender inequality exacerbated in Area C:**

Many factors in Area C contribute to developing inequalities between men and women. These include: the lack of opportunities for economic development; the absence of basic services, including health and educational services; conservative attitudes and behaviors, which are strengthened by feelings of fear and insecurity; concerns related to the security situation, which result in further restricting of women's opportunities to move freely; the lack of executive authorities who can oversee the implementation of governmental plans and programs; an absence of physical spaces for women to meet together and share needs and priorities; the unsustainable nature of community-based organizations (CBOs) to promote information sharing and raise civic awareness as they cannot secure funding; and the inability of policing services to respond freely. All these generate inequalities and lead to negative practices such as early marriage, prohibitions and restrictions on women's political participation and barriers to addressing violence against women (Kvinna til Kvinna, 2012).

## **The Jordan Valley**

Designated as Area C, the Jordan Valley comprises approximately 20 percent of the land of the West Bank. It is rich in natural resources, such as water reservoirs and agricultural land. Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley, like many in Area C, are not connected to electricity, water, telephone or sewage networks, in addition to lacking public transportation. Israel has refused all demands of residents to provide these basic services. Consequently, many Palestinian communities continue to live in harsh and precarious conditions with no access to any kind of service. Currently, a total of 9,500 Palestinians work in agriculture in the illegal Israeli settlements, 1,800 of whom are employed in the agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 92 percent of these laborers are males and 8 percent are females.

## **3.2 Demolition orders, settler harassment and steadfastness**

On the southern slopes of the Hebron hills, Palestinian Bedouin communities, as well as scattered hamlets of herders, are found. Livelihoods are characterized by herding and rearing domestic animals, a mobile livelihood, increasingly hemmed in by surrounding Israeli illegal settlements, military practice zones, and military camps. In this area, Israel does not allow building and basic services are not available. Salma is a 45-year-old, "uneducated" Palestinian woman living under these conditions. She is a mother to seven children, some of who have grown, married and moved away, but most are still living

with her. While attending to her domestic responsibilities, she is also working hard as a shepherd to her flock of goats, which she cares for and, on a daily basis, takes out to graze. Salma must endure the vicious violence and intimidation by Israeli settlers and put up with the soldiers who witness and facilitate her victimization and that of her family, and the marginalization of her community.

### Box (12):

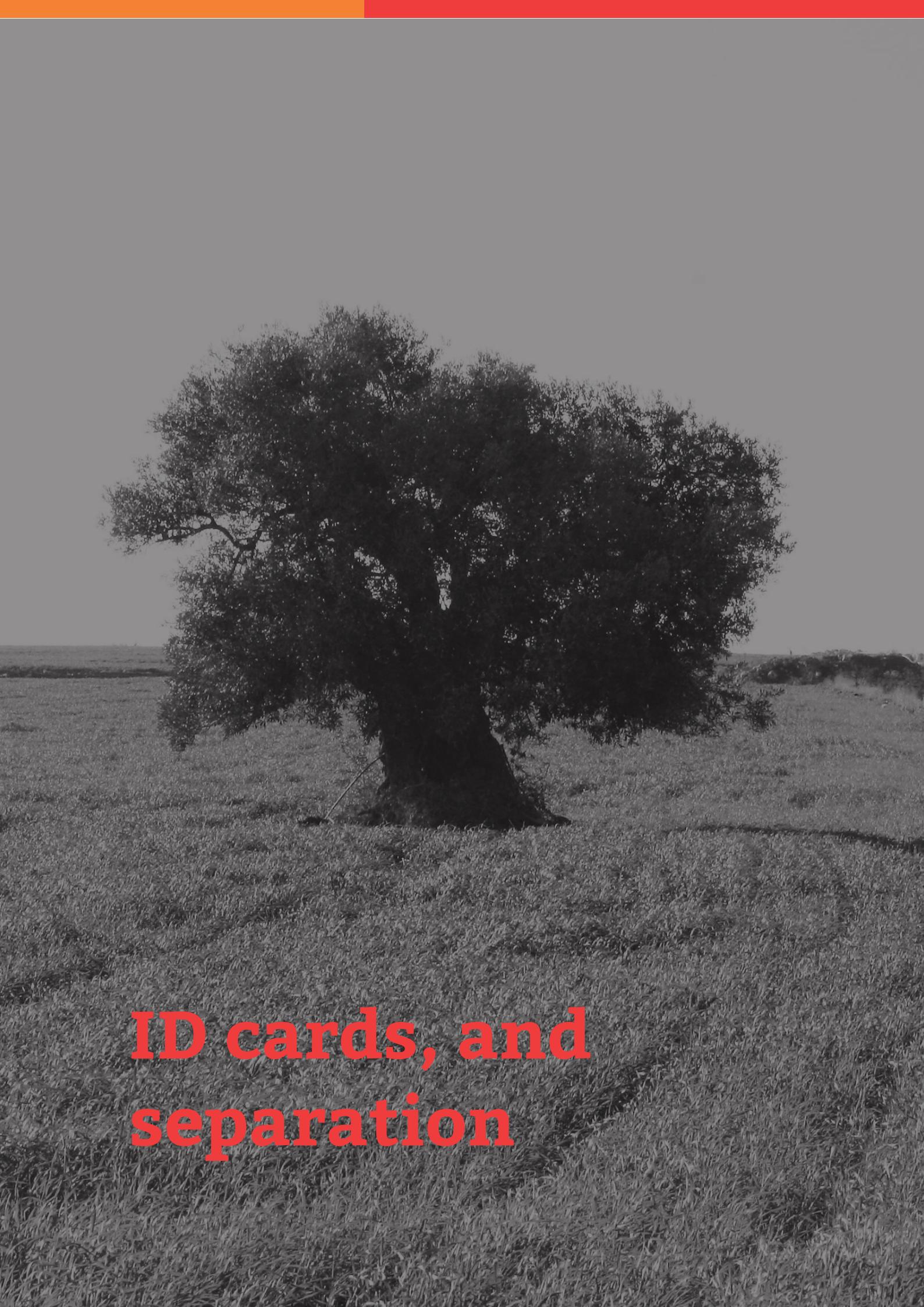
## Khirbet Susiya

The case of Khirbet Susiya is emblematic of Israel's policies in Area C. The Palestinian village of Susiya has existed in the south of the Hebron governorate since the 1830s. In 1983, the illegal Israeli settlement "Susiya" was established near the village, and ever since, Israeli authorities have confiscated land from Palestinians despite the latter's claims and titles. The Israeli military has expelled the indigenous residents from their land numerous times. Various justifications have been employed, such as declaring the area an archeological site or claiming that the Palestinian structures lack building permits. IN other cases, no justification is given at all. The people of Khirbet Susiya are currently living in tents near the site of their original village. Bereft of other options, they build tents and temporary structures to survive and stay on their own land, despite the constant threat of Israeli demolition and destruction. Moreover, these Palestinians face constant harassment and violence by the Israeli settlers who reside in the nearby settlement.

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*"They [Israelis] allow themselves to build homes for the settlers who just moved from every place in the world; while we the owners of the land are unable to build a shack to cover ourselves in the winter and the summer. When we built a place for the family, they [the Israeli military] immediately bulldozed it. International solidarity people came, but they couldn't prevent it. Now, they want us to demolish our tent – the only home that I have for my family. A good day for me is when I don't have to face settlers' violence; I sometimes feel that I am so alone as to be left as prey for the wolves. I remember one time when I was out at the nearby grazing area, and seven huge masked settlers attacked me. They took turns beating me with metal and wooden objects until they finally threw a rock on my head. That's when I fainted, after screaming for help. I waited for any assistance; some members of my family came but, hours after, the ambulance still didn't arrive. The Israeli soldiers prevented it from entering our area, claiming it didn't have the proper papers. I had to be taken to the hospital in the nearby town through an unlicensed, uninsured, car<sup>9</sup>. Some activists and international organizations try to help us, but we had to face the reality on our own. The settlements are expanding, our communities are shrinking, but I insist on taking my goats, my source of livelihood, out to graze as they should."*

<sup>9</sup>Unlicensed cars indicates that such vehicles are not registered with the PA. These cars are no longer originate in Israel and, once they are no longer street-legal, they are dumped in the Palestinian market. Since the PA has no presence in Area C, people use these cars for internal transportation within the village.

A black and white photograph of a large, leafy tree standing in a field of tall grass under a clear sky.

**ID cards, and  
separation**

# 4. ID cards, and separation

## 4.1 Family separation

Palestinian women refugees residing outside Palestine must think long and hard before deciding to marry Palestinians living in the homeland. If married, these refugees will not be accorded residency status. In such a state of legal limbo, they are permitted to obtain a passport issued by the PA, but only with prior authorization from Israeli occupation authorities. Israel rarely accedes to such requests from these married women, preventing their free movement across the roadblocks and checkpoints that it controls. For many of these newlyweds, their new family life comes at the expense of their ties to their original families. Amal married her husband from Gaza in Jordan. Both moved to Gaza 18 years ago and are still dealing with the long, complex and grueling process of residency approval. In the meanwhile, Amal had to cope with the changes in her life and the severing of her relations with her family:

”

*“When the Israelis demolished our house; we had no place to live as a family and were denied the right to re-build. My husband with four of my children had to move to his family’s house in a refugee camp in the Tulkarem region. I had to stay with three of my children in my family’s house. It is very difficult for a woman who is not educated to find any work in Palestinian institutions; I had to continue my work in the nearby settlement. I run between here and where my husband lives; sometimes he uses violence against the children so I must go immediately to deal with that. Violence against me didn’t only come from the Israelis. First I couldn’t find any help after my house was destroyed. I had to work very hard and under difficult conditions in the settlement to save money. When I saved enough, I built a new house on a communal plot of land, but this man from the community came and asked to move out of the house or pay him a big sum of money, claiming that the land is his. ... Once, he came and tried to evict me; he hit me on the head and I had to be hospitalized for two days. No one could protect me from him. A few days after the Israelis came and shattered my dream for this house. My family continues to be torn; I am a wife without husband and a mother to half of my children.”*

**Box (13):**

## Denial of travel and transport services



In addition to the blockade of Gaza, communities in the West Bank and around Jerusalem face extreme limitations and those in the south of Hebron, the Jordan Valley, and the Seam Zone<sup>10</sup> are especially burdened. As a result of closures to these areas and basic movement dependent on Israeli permits, very limited to no transportation infrastructure or systems exist. Reflecting this reality, some members of the impacted communities own private cars that are not always legally registered by the PA or insured, and of a substandard quality. Oftentimes vehicles are not insured, as the Palestinian police has no jurisdiction in the area to enforce relevant laws. Residents take a huge risk riding in such vehicles. This, in addition to other factors elaborated throughout the report, poses risks to community members and induces families to limit the movement and work opportunities of women.

*"The few cars in our community are not insured or registered. My family does not feel comfortable if I ride in one of them. I have no incentive to travel and leave the community and I stopped looking for work."*

*(Woman participant, focus group, South of Hebron)*

*"I used to work in Jerusalem, but now I live outside of the Separation Wall in Al Ram. To get to work might take two hours and I felt that I am wasting my time. My husband already works late and we felt that, for the sake of our kids, I shouldn't come back late as well."*

*(Woman participant, focus group, Jerusalem)*

<sup>10</sup> The Seam Zone corresponds to areas in the West Bank situated between the Separation Wall and the 1949 Armistice Line (the Green Line), excluding East Jerusalem. It has been declared a 'closed military area' by the Israeli army and is severed from the rest of the West Bank. Most Seam Zone communities lack basic health, education and other services, with residents having to pass through a checkpoint to reach agricultural land, workplaces and essential services, and to maintain social relations with family and friends on the 'Palestinian side' of the Separation Wall. Approximately 11,000 individuals live in 12 Palestinian communities in the "Seam Zone". (UN Country Team, 2016). Palestinians in the Seam Zone are required to apply for 'visitor' permits to access their land and pass through the Barrier's gates. The requirement for 'visitor permits' to enter the 'Seam Zone' generally prevents doctors from providing house calls, ambulances from collecting patients and mobile teams providing health services. As a precautionary measure, pregnant women often leave this community one month before delivery to avoid complications. (OCHA, 2011).

## 4.2 IDs, family reunion in EJ

Family separation has many manifestations. Amal's story, being a Palestinian from Jordan and marrying a Palestinian in Gaza, is one example. Another manifestation is the forced separation of families when one of the partners is from Jerusalem and the other from the West Bank or Gaza. As this is a widespread issue and as it is connected to an intensive Israeli policy to displace and evict Palestinians from Jerusalem , women who experience such abuse regularly resort to collective activism, which includes forming committees to resist such actions and provide mutual support. Nadia is a Jerusalemite with an MA in Planning and Management and has engaged in the Struggle through political and community groups. She transformed her personal struggles into collective agency and efforts to change the surrounding reality.

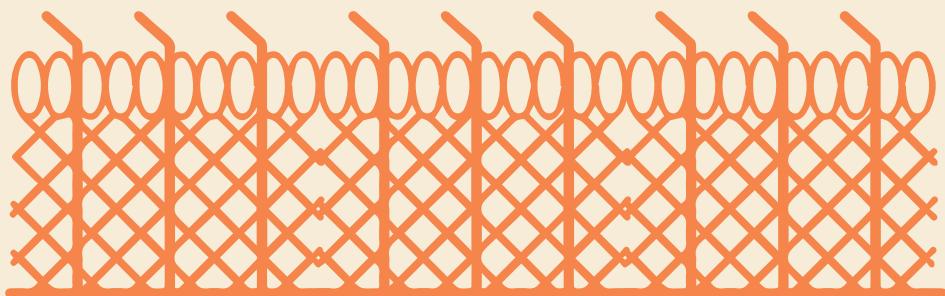
”

*“I married the love of my life. He is from Gaza and, decades after our marriage, his residency in Ramallah is considered illegal by the Israelis. He can't come and live with me in Jerusalem. As a family, we must keep two homes, one in Jerusalem for me to preserve my residency and so my children can maintain their Jerusalem residency. To maintain our place in Jerusalem is so expensive, in the form of rent, very high taxes, and continuous inspections by the Israelis, who check that I am physically residing in my home. If I failed any of these inspections they will strip me of my ID. It took me many years and extreme effort to earn residency [status] for my children. To prove my residency, I keep tons of papers; it is exhausting. Since 2007, many homes in my neighborhood of Sheikh Jarah have become threatened; some Palestinian residents were evicted and others continue to receive notices that they should leave to allow Israeli settlers to move in. I decided to form the Sheikh Jarah Women's Forum for us to work together to resist Israeli actions, raise legal awareness and provide support to each other. My neighbors look out for my home while I am away. During the weekend, I go to Ramallah to spend time with my husband and the family is united. We laugh, we love and then we part again to live our separate lives.”*

<sup>11</sup> According to The Association of Civil Rights in Israel: "The Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem hold the status of permanent residents of Israel. However, the state treats them as foreigners, whose residency status can be revoked on a regular basis. The residents are forced to defend their residency constantly by proving the location of their 'center of life' to the Ministry of Interior and to the social security services; meanwhile the revocation of residency status often takes place in an arbitrary manner and without a fair process." <http://www.acri.org.il/en/category/east-jerusalem/citizenship-and-residency-east-jerusalem/>

**Box (14):**

## The blockade of Gaza Strip



*"If Gaza is to recover from the damage wrought by multiple rounds of hostility, the blockade must be lifted. The people deserve help and realization of their human rights, not collective punishment" (Special Rapporteur Makarim Wibisono, 19 June 2015)*

### Gaza Strip: Key facts

Fenced in by borders with Israel and Egypt and denied control over its airspace or territorial waters, the Gaza Strip's access to the outside world is restricted to three land crossings, controlled by Israel (Erez and Kerem Shalom) and Egypt (Rafah). According to various UN and other international organizations such as Amnesty International, the Israeli blockade is an illegal form of collective punishment of the civilian population<sup>12</sup>. The humanitarian impact of the blockade is exacerbated by the almost-continuous additional closure of the Rafah passenger crossing by Egypt since October 2014, leaving the vast majority of the Palestinians living in Gaza unable to leave. (OCHA Humanitarian Overview, 2016)

- Since 2007, Israel has imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the Gaza Strip
- Close to two million Palestinians in Gaza are 'locked in' (PCBS, 2017b)
- Access to areas within several hundred meters of the Israeli fence surrounding Gaza is prohibited as designated an "Access Restricted Area"
- Longstanding access restrictions imposed by Israel have undermined Gaza's economy, resulting in the world's highest levels of unemployment (World Bank, 2014), food insecurity and aid dependency

<sup>12</sup>Please refer to: <https://imeu.org/article/israels-blockade-of-gaza-is-it-legal>

# 5. Blockade of Gaza: Restricting opportunities and access to medical treatment

## 5.1 Aspiring young journalists and the blockade of Gaza

The realities and practices of the Occupation not only increase the burdens on women, but also force women into roles they had not anticipated. The closure of Gaza has forced many women to take up roles that are not big enough to fit their ambitions. Like thousands of highly-educated women, Noora, (who holds an MA in journalism), was unable to leave Gaza for lack of an Israeli-issued permit to cross the Erez checkpoint. With a very high unemployment rate among educated women<sup>13</sup>, she could not find the opportunity she aspired to, leading her to settle for traditional roles:

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*“For 10 years, I attempted to leave Gaza to go to a country where I could be an influential and famous journalist. I wanted to be the Christiane Amanpour of the Arab world. Israel never allowed me to leave for various security reasons. I was nominated for a number of training and internship missions outside of Gaza, but never made it. As a result, I settled into marriage and had two beloved children. I find work sometimes as a freelance journalist. But with the bombing of my house and many of my neighbors, I started feeling extremely insecure for my children; I decided not to leave the house so I could ensure that they are ok. My mother-in-law is very supportive; she suggested that I take up embroidery in my spare time and I started as a means of providing peace of mind and to help cover household expenses. Sometimes, I start drawing the country of my dreams, where I am a well-known journalist. But I am here now.”*

<sup>13</sup> The unemployment rate among women with 13 school years and above stands at 50.6% of women in this group. PCBS, 2017. [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_7-3-2017-IWD-en.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_7-3-2017-IWD-en.pdf)

**Box (15):**

## **Testimonies on denial of access to education**



"We had to take our daughter out of school as we genuinely feel that it is unsafe for her to cross the Qalandia checkpoint to her school on the other side. Not only because the soldiers are mean and are carrying guns. She also has to endure long, crowded lines squeezed in the middle of so many men. She feels harassed and we feel it is not safe." (Woman participant, focus group, Jerusalem)



"In my community, there was no school. The Israelis do not allow us to build one. We had to walk to the nearby community and we were harassed by the soldiers and the settlers. At 14 years old, my parents felt it is not worth it and feared too much for my life and honor. I had to drop out. Not doing anything else, I got married at 15." (Woman participant, focus group, Jordan Valley)

## **5.2 Blockade and obstacles to special medical treatment**

Dreams can dwindle when facing the unremitting challenges of the Occupation, but lives are also threatened. The impossibility of leaving the Gaza Strip is a matter of life and death to many. Hajar has thyroid cancer. Since 2008 she has had to undergo chemotherapy treatments to address her condition:

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*“I used to go to Egypt to get chemotherapy and from there was referred to West Bank hospitals. I would take my children with me, so that I could spend time with them. Since the 2014 War, the borders with Egypt have been closed and the Israelis would not give me a permit to get my treatment in the West Bank. I had to decide: should I live or surrender to cancer? I decided to live for my children and my husband. But that is painful as I had to be emotionally strong and heal myself inside. It was a very difficult process to accept the reality that I am not getting the treatment I need. I go through depression and I lose hope sometimes. I thought about suicide once or more. They ask how do I feel and I can tell that my outside is strong, while my heart beneath is burning. But I cling to life. My body is very weak; I can't perform my role as a mother or wife, but my husband encourages me by saying that he is happy enough to feel my presence at home and that I don't have to do any work. His sisters help me and my children do the same. I visit the women's support center nearby; I feel it is my second home. Somehow, we women are sticking together to cope and overcome.”*

**Box (16):**

## **Denial of medical treatment for Palestinians in Gaza**



In 2016, out of 13,788 applications for medical permits for treatment in the West Bank, roughly 66 percent of the total, were approved; a lower rate than in 2014 or 2015. Further, 601 applicants were summoned for questioning, 189 of whom were women. 35 percent (7,267) of the applications were for cancer treatment and, of these, 28 percent were denied or went unanswered.

**Box (17):**

## **Testimonies on the denial of access to health services**



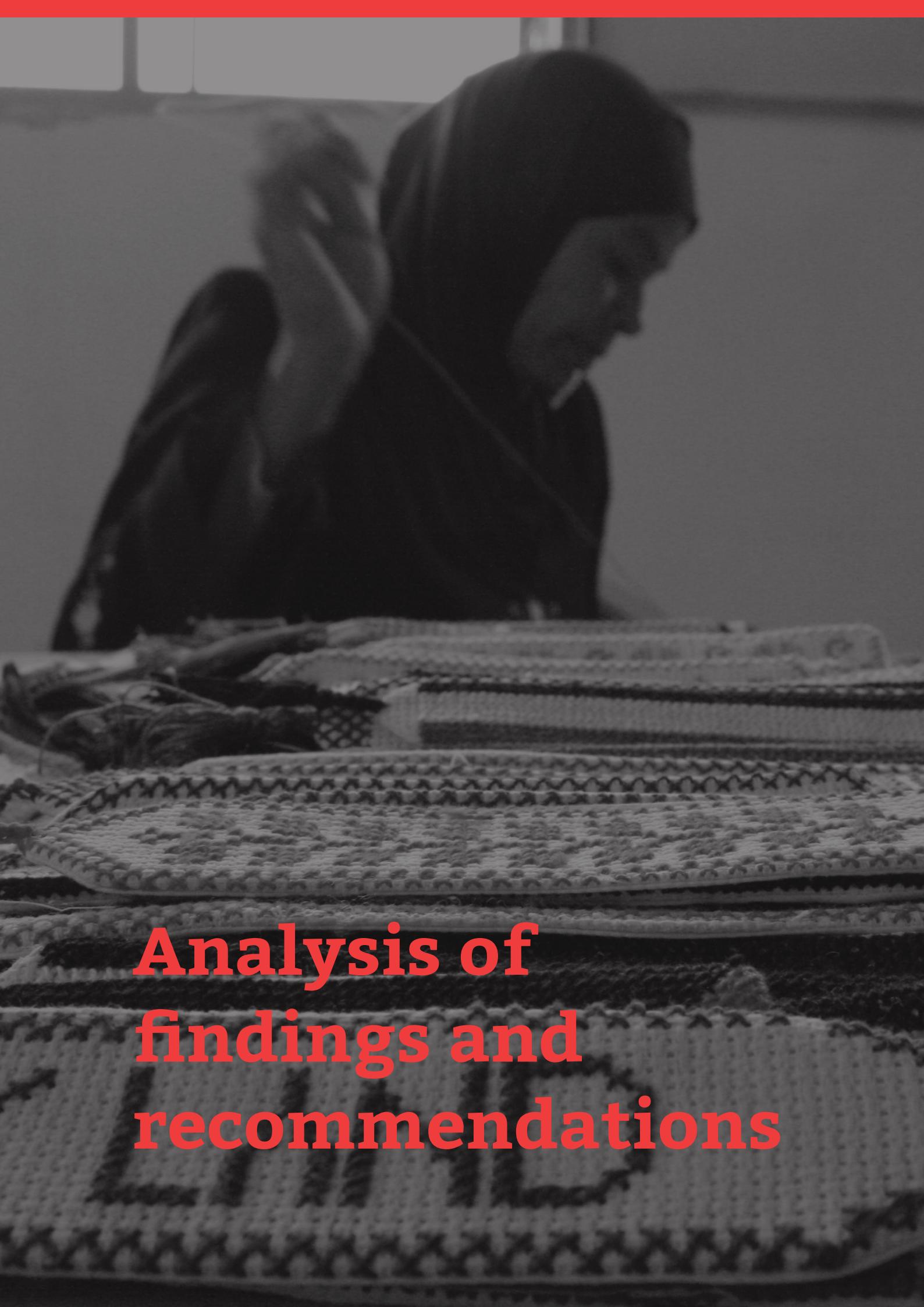
"I am married to a man from Jerusalem and have not yet been given a permit to reside in the city. I had to settle for lower quality services during my pregnancy, while the Jerusalem hospital that provides much better services is less than 20 minutes away from where I live." (Woman participant, focus group, Jerusalem)



"In our community, there are no health facilities. Once, one of our relatives got bitten by a snake and there were no cars to take him to the hospital. We called the ambulance and they came after 20 minutes. But then they were not allowed into the community as the Israeli military claimed that they didn't have the right permits to enter. We had to carry our relative to the ambulance to get the antidote." (Woman participant, focus group, South of Hebron)



"My neighbor lost her child waiting at the checkpoint to enter Jerusalem. The soldiers looked at her and her husband and they laughed." (Woman participant, focus group, Jerusalem)

A black and white photograph showing a person from the side and slightly from behind, sitting at a table. The person is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and trousers. They are looking down at something on the table. The table has a patterned cloth with a repeating geometric or floral design. The background is plain and light-colored.

# **Analysis of findings and recommendations**

# Introduction

This section provides a summary of the main findings, reflecting the perspectives, concerns and comments shared by women in interviews and focus groups.

## 1. Prolonged occupation reinforcing patriarchy

The voices of women in the interviews and focus groups were clear in identifying the Occupation as the primary factor negatively influencing their daily lives. The reality of occupation is confining, violent, belligerent, and abusive, limits their freedom of movement and imposes further restrictions on women's mobility, leading to increased isolation. Furthermore, it has a disempowering effect, as Palestinian society's preoccupation with ending the Occupation often leads to neglect or dismissal of efforts to place social issues and rights, including women rights, at the top of the national agenda. In economic terms, the high unemployment rates influence both genders, but women experience the consequences at much greater rates. Educated women in general, and especially those in Gaza, endure some of the highest unemployment rates in Palestine. A general atmosphere of insecurity has become a breeding ground for heightened political, social, and religious conservatism and, hence, greater impositions on women's freedoms and rights. This research suggests that occupation is associated with higher levels of tension and violence in some households, while, in others, it leads to more unity and solidarity within the household. Palestinian women experience direct violations of basic human rights, most notably the right to life, the right to safety, the right to housing, the right to family, the right to movement, the right to freedom, and the right to education and basic health.

The continuation of the Occupation and its actions reinforce the traditional patriarchal system, as reflected in the report, by amplifying stringent restrictions and increased control over women's freedom and movements, by further limiting women's access to basic services and rights, such as education and health, and by increasing their exposure to violence, whether it comes from the IDF/settlers or from their own communities and families. On the one hand, women must endure the mounting pressure that comes from life under a suffocating occupation and the limited economic, political, and social opportunities. On other hand, they try to lessen their personal suffering, resulting from the Occupation, efforts that sometimes find common ground in their fight against further pressures from the prevailing social, cultural and legal conditions that exacerbate violations against women in the private sphere (family) and public sphere (the labor market, government policies, and legal frameworks).

The entangled and pervasive nature of occupation-related violations means that society's attention and prioritization of social and cultural violations against women often moves at glacial pace. According to a human rights expert from Gaza:

In conclusion, the findings illustrate that the influence of the Israeli Occupation is three-fold:

1. The Occupation exacerbates patriarchal arrangements and traditional gender norms.
2. The Occupation and its continued manifestations expose women and men to higher levels and extreme forms of violence, leading to further marginalization and violence against women and girls within the household setting.
3. In facing the Occupation some women find internal strength and mobilize untapped resources for empowerment and support within their families, communities and other women.

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*“While individual women struggle to deal with personal concerns emanating from the Occupation and gender discrimination, the overall environment becomes more and more restrictive of the efforts of women’s groups to undo the patriarchal system. With the fragmentation of society and with institutions and civil society kept busy with occupation violations and their inability to protect people or provide for their needs, people, including women, tend to cling to traditional roles and find support in traditional institutions. This is reinforced through the instability resulting from the Palestinian political division where the [Palestinian] Legislative Council is not practicing its legislative or monitoring functions. No genuine change will take place under these circumstances. Women will continue to find ways to solve their immediate issues, but have no energy or time to change women’s collective suffering resulting from the Israeli Occupation.”*

## 2. Demystifying Palestinian women (diverse, resourceful, activists)

Women consulted in this research challenged the notion that Palestinian women and their families encourage violence. To all of them, this discourse amounts to blaming the victims of occupation. They cited clear acts of perpetration of violence and profound violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people practiced by the occupying power. To all of the women, Israel’s military occupation and its myriad human rights violations, along with the relative silence of the international community, are the real violence. Like all women participating in this research, Nadia asserted the following:

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*“No woman wants her children to be killed, tortured or victimized in any way. We live our lives in fear for the safety of our children. We work very hard to protect them from the violence of the Occupation and keep an eye on them to make sure that they don’t resort to any violence, as we know the results will be deadly for them. This is an occupation that has no limits, when it comes to violations of human rights; it does what it wants anyway with little or no intervention/penalty from the international community.”*

Another participant in a focus group (East Jerusalem) articulates the nature of Israel’s colonial occupation: “They come to us, we don’t go them. We find the soldiers and settlers in front of our homes. We must confront them. They attack Gaza with F16s and they say that we are attacking them. They just don’t want us here; they want this land without its people and whatever is left. They want to take away our right to resist. They blame the victims for their actions.”

While all Palestinian women endure and persevere under the conditions of the Occupation, women living under occupation do not constitute a homogenous group. The impact of occupation on each woman is different depending on her background, social class, region, age and education. Women's responses to occupation-related violations are also contingent on these factors. The personal, emotional and psychological readiness of each woman, in addition to the surrounding family and community conditions, including a woman's support system within the family, community, the limited institutional resources, and limited services available, are all important determinants. According to a woman participant from the Jordan Valley:

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*“I hate when the media and politicians talk about the (Palestinian woman), as if we are all the same. We are women with different needs and coping strategies.”*

Determining the resilience and empowerment of women can only be accomplished when it is based on the real lives of women themselves. Women vary greatly in their responses to adversity. While some lose hope and find resources to cope within traditional settings, others are able to turn adversity into an empowering opportunity. This is not to underestimate the brutal conditions of occupation, but rather to convey that rigorous analysis reveals that Palestinian women living under occupation are resourceful. Listening carefully to their experiences encourages researchers and activists to take a second look at a familiar world; a world that is dominated by a male-hegemonic perspective and reinforced by occupation-based propaganda that promotes false and negative images of women.

For example, a woman participant from Hebron stresses the need to debunk the images of women in the international media and the dominant discourse. She asserts:

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*“To the nationalists and to our well-meaning supporters, we are either victims continuously portrayed as weeping and screaming, or as enduring pain and adversity. We are neither this nor that. We are human beings with double the burdens. We didn't ask for these burdens, they were imposed upon us.”*

One of the women's rights experts in Gaza clarifies this point further:

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*“We as activists in the women's movement and with our supporters around the world found that it's easy and convenient to create false images of Palestinian women. We thought that we could do so many tasks at the same time: fight the Occupation, deal with its impacts, deal with unemployment, loss of homes and lives, and bring about full social, economic and political rights to women. In doing that, we placed even more pressure on women, expecting them to multi-task beyond their human capacities and without any real support in an environment that is disabling. The duality of images (one of complete victimization and another of complete superwomen) left women on their own to keep up with these expectations.”*

### 3. Resilience and empowerment in face of adversity

The vicious, prolonged human rights violations of the Occupation leave women with real losses. The destruction of one's own home, the killing of family members, the killing of women and girls, the restriction of movement, family fragmentation, imprisonment and torture are all violations that are real and have long-term direct and indirect effects on women. The levels of pain, sadness, hardship, and other psychological trauma among women participating in the research are beyond comprehension. The researchers working on this project could only feel and present fragments of the real suffering of the women directly impacted by the Occupation. Women do not deny the harm inflicted on them as a result of all the listed violations. Some of them use terms such as sadness, helplessness, depression and withdrawal to describe their feelings. In addition to that, interventions by organizations do not always lead to real solutions as some losses can never be compensated:

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*“They say that I should forget my daughters [killed in the Gaza war] and move on. How could I do that? The death of my girls will not be undone. How could I go on without them? My body is here but my soul is with them.” (Azza, Gaza)*

Others are forced into accepting traditional roles, as illustrated in the stories listed above, as well as the next quote:

”

*“I had to settle and accept being a traditional housewife as I can’t leave [Gaza] and go to a country where I could pursue a career and can’t find a job here because of the blockade.” (Noora, Gaza)*

Israeli policies and practices force nuclear families to live in extended-family arrangements, further limiting women’s independence:

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*“Without a permit to build my own home on our land, I must live with my extended family, which means more control and pressure from everyone to conform. The extended family is watching every step that I make.” (Woman participant, focus group, Jordan Valley) <sup>14</sup>*

Women demonstrate resilience in the face of violations by occupation forces. They all attempt to develop coping methods that will help them persevere and overcome.

<sup>14</sup> Israeli zoning regulations in the Jordan Valley restrict the building space available for families, who, denied the opportunity to build horizontally, must instead build vertically.

At the same time, resources for women are not uniformly available across the diversity of individual circumstances, family and community conditions. To many women, occupation-violations add new burdens, which compound their disempowerment, especially in the absence of an enabling legal, institutional, economic and socio-cultural environment. As one research participant explains:

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*“My husband used to work in Israel for a good pay. But now, he is prevented from going back to his work and I had to work as domestic help in a house nearby. That is not something that people in the community or in my family accept. I had to cover my face with a Niqab to avoid being labeled as the maid. Now, I must work at home and in other people’s homes. I must deal with a husband who is frustrated and doesn’t provide. He is mostly angry and sometimes resorts to drugs to cope.” (Woman participant, focus group, Rafah, Gaza)*

For other women, the harsh experiences that their husbands endure are projected on to them as well. They must stay in the marriage not only because they think it is the right thing to do, but because of the images about women sticking with the (hero) husband (e.g. ex-prisoner) or being the heroines who must sacrifice for the collective good:

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*“When my son was killed by the Israeli soldiers and brought to me by the youth of the neighborhood, everyone insisted that I display joy and cry because my son is a martyr. Maybe he is a martyr, but he is my son before anything else. I must live with the sorrow and keep it for myself.” (Woman participant, focus group, Hebron)*

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*“I was very active in the Struggle; I married my husband out of love. He was also active in the Struggle. We shared very progressive ideas and we lived very well. He was arrested by the occupation forces in the middle of the night. He was sentenced to five years and I would go to visit him every time I could. I suffered so much from the harassment and abuse of the Israeli military. My husband knew that but couldn’t do anything about it. In some occasions, he told me that he felt insufficient and started to become conservative.” (Woman participant, focus group, East Jerusalem)*

In other cases, women with a more enabling environment and support system exhibit higher levels of resilience. Some find strength in other women:

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*“When I found myself alone facing the Israeli violations and settlers’ attacks, I had to find support in the other women living in my neighborhood. We established a society that watches our homes; common interests and we use it to raise awareness on house demolition and family reunion in Jerusalem.” (Nadia, East Jerusalem)*

”

*“My mother-in-law and my women friends in the neighborhood help me cope with the separation from my family in Jordan. They keep me involved in their activities and support me emotionally.” (Amal, Gaza)*

Others find inner strength, which is solidified through family support:

”

*“Facing occupation forces and settlers since childhood made me stronger; I didn’t think then that I could have the strength that I know I have now. My father and immediate family supported me. I feel that I am the most qualified to defend the rights of my community and represent the best interests of my people in the local and international forums. Unlike most women in my community I got my university education and now I serve as model for younger girls. I am working on bringing women together in an organized association.” (Somoud, South of Hebron)*

With inner strength and supportive families, other factors, such as the presence of active international members of solidarity groups in the impacted region or cultural opportunities for expression, contribute to women’s empowerment:

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*“I felt empowered and different; my brother was my rock as he helped me deal with the social and cultural limitations. But my activism with international solidarity persons opened my eyes to how things could be. Their presence helped me realize that practicing freedom and enjoying rights is ok for a woman. But eventually I had to find my own soul my own way; entering into the field of theater was my way of healing, expressing and helping in the Struggle.” (Dina, Tubas region)*

## 4. Women's views on interventions by government, civil society and international organizations

To reach a comprehensive understanding, women's responses to Israeli occupation violations must be viewed within the overall context of Palestinian economic and social policies, the functioning of Palestinian and international civil society organizations and international support to Palestinians. In general, women were highly critical of the performance of all these institutions, as they felt that they are lacking in their support to women facing violations by the Occupation.

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*“Both the ruling government in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank have no interest in women and families that suffer from the Occupation. Our homes were demolished and families were devastated, but we continue to live in substandard caravans without any hope for change in sight.” (Woman participant, focus group, Gaza)*

*“How would we cope if the government does not create jobs? Men can't find work and we can't find work. We are forced to rely on minimal help from some charitable organizations and UNRWA.” (Woman participant, focus group, Gaza)*

*“Women in Jerusalem are left to their own devices. They must find solutions to complex legal and economic demands to stay put in the city. Very limited legal support is available through local NGOs.” (Woman participant, focus group, Jerusalem)*

Women understand that their personal efforts are essential in coping at the individual level, but realize that without overall structural change, which addresses the root cause (i.e. the continuation of the Occupation), and real improvements in the lives of Palestinians in general and women in particular, women will continue to bear the overwhelming burdens of the Occupation on their own. Their individual and small-group efforts are not transformed into collective rights, opportunities, or institutionalized interventions.

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*“While we are strong and willing to exert more effort, we need much more support to alleviate occupation-related suffering and achieve human rights. I am strong but must endure; other women don't necessarily have the same strength that I have. Must they break down and just cry?” (Woman participant, focus group, Jordan Valley)*

*“We do all this hard work to keep our families close and supported and we make all these sacrifices giving up our own needs and feelings, but what do we get as women? No equal rights. We continue to face discrimination in work, marriage and culture.” (Woman participant, focus group, Gaza)*

*"We do all this hard work to keep our families close and supported and we make all these sacrifices giving up our own needs and feelings, but what do we get as women? No equal rights. We continue to face discrimination in work, marriage and culture." (Woman participant, focus group, Gaza)*

*Women are especially critical of the international community and believe that the silence of the world towards the Israeli Occupation's human rights violations provides Israel with the impunity to continue with its violations:*

*"What do you expect? If the world turns its back and pretends that nothing is going on, Israel will take that as its cue to continue its atrocities." (Woman participant, focus group, Hebron)*

*"We get some protection from volunteers and some international NGOs. In Hebron, we have an international presence<sup>15</sup>; all it does is document and report. It is the job of the big powers like the UN, the US and the EU to protect Palestinians." (Somoud, south of Hebron)*

*"Some NGOs reinforce dependency and demoralization of women; they treat women like subjects in their project experimentation. Palestinian NGOs are encouraged to treat women as charity cases; they ask women to participate in activities and pay for their participation in food vouchers. That doesn't help reliance; it doesn't help women. In some cases, women reported that their husbands encouraged them to participate to get the money to smoke, and not to fix the demolished house or provide for the family. Women in this case are abused by everyone."*  
*(Palestinian feminist, in-depth interview, Gaza)*

The findings confirm that while women are able to cope and overcome their personal challenges, they must do so in the face of gender discrimination, which burdens women living in a patriarchal society. This is further explained by one of the women experts in Gaza:

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*"Women must jump through one hoop to another; on their own or with limited resources, they must endure. The stories of heroism are not to be denied, but how many new jobs, laws and other opportunities are provided to help women? How much of the cultural discrimination is undone by all these sacrifices? What are women's organizations doing to help women in general? And why do most international organizations not provide the protection to Palestinian women as per international law? All are not doing much, as the funding is directed for relief and not to rid us from the Occupation or to achieve sustainable development. Under the prevailing environment women might do well individually, but are failing collectively. The society is in denial and the reality of the Occupation is overwhelming our possibilities to create real macro change to achieve equality." (Palestinian feminist, in-depth interview, Gaza).*

<sup>15</sup>The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), a UN-sanctioned body.



# Recommendations

This report reveals that despite current programs and interventions, which may help alleviate the suffering of Palestinian women, women attempt to cope, resist and transcend on their own. However, they are incapable of ending the violations of their rights and violence against them under the present policies and practices of the Israeli occupation policies, and the tepid response of the international community, which fails to hold Israel accountable. Their lives will be significantly improved only by ending the Israeli Occupation and holding Israel accountable for its violations of basic human rights, international laws, and numerous UN resolutions.

One cannot overemphasize the value of strong advocacy work with and for the benefit of Palestinians, and Palestinian women in particular, work that is capable of creating pressure on governments and international organizations to change their policies and positions towards the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. Such advocacy work can contribute to governments and organizations shifting their efforts and funds from temporary humanitarian and developmental work within the existing coercive environment created by the Israeli Occupation to taking more powerful positions against Israeli violations and exerting pressure on Israel to end the Occupation. According to an EU official in Jerusalem “One policy change at capital level is worth all the programming you can do”.

The following recommendations begin with a focus on advocacy, before transitioning to more detailed policy recommendations for various actors. The recommendations are based first and foremost on women’s priorities, needs and key messages conveyed, in their own words, during the in-depth interviews and focus groups. Moreover, these recommendations are also informed by the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with key experts from interdisciplinary fields.

It should be emphasized that all recommendations must be contextualized and operationalized based on two cross-cutting ideas:

1. Design and plan interventions on the basis of a feminist and women’s rights-based approach. This entails placing relations between men and women, as well as inter-sectionality, in the center of the analysis, promoting women’s empowerment, participation and leadership, including positive actions when needed, emphasizing values grounded in relationships and giving visibility to all the caring work, and fostering an emphasis on empowerment processes and the surrounding environment. Interventions should be rooted in the principles of participation, accessibility and diversity and should engage local feminist and women’s organizations.
2. Incorporate violence against women and girls as a priority in all aspects of policy planning, development, programming and advocacy.

# **First: The policy level**

## **The Palestinian Authority:**

Women who participated in this study emphasized that they expect the support to first come from the PA. There is a broad consensus that the Palestinian women facing Israeli violations must be targeted systematically by government interventions. This includes financial support, provision of services, subsidized health care, housing, free education, and the necessary resources to empower them and relieve their burdens.

Based on women's priorities, the following are key recommendations for the role of the PA

- The PA must integrate women's needs and priorities, especially women who are deeply affected by the Occupation in Area C, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, into its sector and national development strategies including the PA's National Policy Agenda, the National Development Strategy, and other sector-specific strategies, including those of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of East Jerusalem, Ministry of Local Government and Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission.
- The PA should promote an enabling environment aligned with international declarations and standards to protect women human rights. This implies the modification of discriminatory laws and policies, as well as the operationalization of national strategies and plans.
- The PA should provide a proper and fair social safety net and social security that financially supports women in marginalized areas who are impacted by the Israeli Occupation's practices (e.g., women in the Jordan Valley who have to work in Israeli settlements, often in brutal conditions, due to the lack of opportunities, women with demolished homes in Gaza and women in Area C, who face the persistent threat of business and home demolition, both of which cause great financial, psychological, and social distress, among others).
- The PA should commit substantial efforts to improve Palestinian women's access to the legal and justice system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- The PA should exert greater pressure on Israel and Egypt to end the blockade of Gaza and take increased responsibility for the Palestinians living in the territory, especially women.
- The PA has a major role to play in terms of advocating for Palestinian women, with a focus on the most impacted areas. The government should use its official media sources as a platform for such advocacy.
- Media outlets affiliated with the PA should also focus on challenging the Israeli/mainstream narrative and prepare an effective response to misrepresentation of Palestinian women in Israeli media outlets or other international mainstream media.

# Humanitarian and development international organizations

- Continue to promote internationally-accepted standards and rights including the right to self-determination and the right to development, both relevant in the context of the Occupation's policies of denial of identity and de-development.
- Continue to emphasize the relevance and obligations of internationally-accepted conventions and documents pertaining to the rights of women under occupation and conflict areas, such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325), pertaining to women and peace and security<sup>16</sup>.
- Ensure that the needs and rights of those women most impacted by the Occupation are integrated in international organizations' policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the EU Policy Framework and the European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine. In addition, international consortiums of NGOs, such as the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), must promote the integration of women's rights and needs in the work of their own members and that of other donor governments and international organizations. These must also be reflected in reporting to international agencies, such as the annual report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) of the UN. Finally, budgetary allocation must also be aligned, specifically ensuring that adequate financing and technical support is available for development activities that benefit Palestinian women most affected by occupation, with an emphasis on the need to end the root cause of women's adversity – the Israeli Occupation.
- International organizations need to ensure their advocacy products reach their governments, in order to create bilateral pressure on Israel.
- Increase the international presence in marginalized areas and incorporate a programmatic and thematic focus aiming to raise awareness of the daily lives of Palestinian women living under the Occupation and support their resilience.
- Increase financial and technical support to Palestinian women's organizations working to empower Palestinian women, especially in remote and marginalized areas.

"Women's organizations work is more difficult under occupation, we have a vision and we know where we're going, but the Occupation is restricting us" (Women's organizations In-depth Interview, Ramallah). Some women in the focus groups cited examples of receiving psycho-social or economic support from NGOs that work with women.

- Establish clear standards and principles for gender equality and apply risk-mitigation to avoid any potential reinforcement of gender discrimination in all development and humanitarian program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, especially in Area C, EJ and Gaza.
- Support the efforts of state and non-state Palestinian media organizations to build their capacity in reporting and advocating for Palestinian women.
- Support women's organizations in their efforts to further focus on women who suffer from occupation violations.

<sup>16</sup>UN Security Council, Resolution 1325, 2000. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

"The PBC [Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation] has a Women's Unit but they need long-term capacity building and technical support in order to be able to function properly for the benefit of Palestinian women" (Media expert, in-depth interview, Ramallah)

- Support the young generation of girls to become citizen journalists, capable of documenting, voicing, and transmitting evidence of Israeli violations to the world. Capacity building, technical support and provision of communication tools can provide young people with the tools and the skills to advocate for the rights of Palestinian women.
- Support improved documentation and data collection mechanisms to ensure that all violations against women are reported and documented. In addition, support the collection, disaggregation, and analysis of data by gender, as it relates to occupation-related violations.

"The problem of some human rights organizations is that we shy away and get scared of Israel, the PA the third-party states and everyone... A clear message and efforts should be made towards calling for economic and diplomatic sanctions on Israel for its violations of international law" (Representative of a human rights organization, in-depth interview, Ramallah)

## Programming

- The focus of programming must be the fundamental need to end the Occupation - "the root cause of suffering" - and hold Israel accountable for its actions. Even when advocacy pertains to a specific topic or area of the Occupation's impact, a call to end the Occupation and hold Israel accountable for its violations is necessary.
- Alongside advocacy to end the Occupation, strong advocacy, humanitarian and development programs should be enacted to engage different local, national and international stakeholders in efforts to transform the patriarchal system, to end violence against women and girls and to promote Palestinian women's rights.
- Advocacy with/for Palestinian women should call for the type of support that the women themselves identify as needed. From the results of this study, the number one priority in the eyes of women was ending the Israeli Occupation and its practices, violations of human rights, and violence, after which, the following priorities were identified:
  - Provide psychological and social support, especially after traumatic experiences resulting from human rights violations, whether they are caused by the Israeli Occupation or the unequal gender relations rooted in the patriarchal system. Examples include: gender based violence, human loss, demolition, imprisonment and attacks by settlers and soldiers. Such support is most effective when it originates from close people within local communities, rather than strangers.
    - Provide disaster risk-reduction (DRR) programming and education within the communities exposed to higher levels of occupation violations, such as those in Gaza, Area C and EJ. DRR programming includes activities related to legislation, policies, strategies and practices that are developed and applied to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks.
    - Provide economic support in terms of provision of work opportunities for women. These can be small grants to establish micro-businesses, which they perceive

to be more beneficial than training and workshops where money is spent on logistics that are deemed irrelevant.

- Provide legal support in special cases where legal procedures are needed (family unification, land confiscation, imprisonment or retribution).
- Engage women's organizations and feminist organizations in the design and planning of the programs to ensure ownership and appropriateness related to Palestinian women's agenda and needs.

”

*“Solidarity with Palestinian women should not be because you feel sorry for us, it should be because you want to defend the principles and values being broken and violated by the Israeli Occupation on a daily basis” (Women's rights organization, in-depth interview, Ramallah)*

## Second: Advocacy and media

- Women should speak for themselves. Any advocacy done with, or on behalf of, Palestinian women should be based on women's realities, views, and perceptions and should adopt their narrative in a manner that challenges the invisibility of their experiences.

*“Mainstream media focuses on violations and does not present women and their point of view. Coverage is male-dominated and weakens women” (Media expert, in-depth interview, Ramallah).*

- Caution should be exercised when applying human rights and international law in the context of advocacy. An overly legalistic emphasis on the illegality of the Occupation risks overshadowing the real human impact of its practices and abuses.

*“Pain is invisible. We don't talk about it, because we use the wrong terminology, such as human rights and the legal terms of international law, thus silencing the experience and pain of women” (Palestinian feminist, in-depth interview, Jerusalem).*

- Palestinian women are not a homogenous group and should not be portrayed as such. Accordingly, advocacy efforts should be inclusive of the different types of women in Palestinian society, so as not to contribute to stereotyping and the exclusionary mainstream narrative. Efforts should be made to reach vulnerable women especially in remote and marginalized areas to convey their stories.

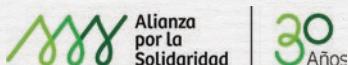
*“We rarely focus on differences and exceptions from the mainstream, especially among foreign organizations. We should go more to vulnerable areas instead of staying in Ramallah and conducting more workshops. Women can talk for themselves, but we need to get to them, instead of conveying our point of view” (Media expert, in-depth interview, Ramallah).*

- Non-traditional and creative advocacy methods should be utilized (e.g. short movies, arts, etc.) to deliver messages to a wider audience, using the assets of social networks as a vehicle for transmission.

- Maximize the utilization of social media to advocate for elimination of violence against women, promote gender rights and aid in illuminating the realities that Palestinian women face every day under occupation. An educational and advocacy video expressing part of these realities was produced in conjunction with this research.
- Local and international media organizations should be encouraged to develop and adopt special coverage practices that account for the unique and adverse impact of the Israeli Occupation on Palestinian women. They should cover the stories from a feminist perspective and ensure their journalists receive proper training on how to report the stories of women living under occupation.

“Coverage of Palestinian women is inadequate and inappropriate. Women are either portrayed as helpless victims or as an exaggerated heroic icon, and both are cruel portrayals. The media should be reinvented to respect women and treat them as human beings” (Palestinian feminist, in-depth interview, Gaza).

“Coverage of the Palestinian woman in the media should not be limited to cases of loss and death. She should be covered as she works on her land, as she resists and succeeds through her work, her political achievements and all other positive aspects of her life in addition to her suffering” (Women’s rights organizations, in-depth interview, Gaza).



Alianza por la Solidaridad (ALIANZA) is an international non-governmental organization (INGO) combining more than 30 years of experience in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, communication and advocacy campaigns and with a presence in more than 14 countries. ALIANZA has been present in the oPt since 1993, actively working within a gender-focus strategy.  
<http://www.alianzaporlasolidaridad.org/en/paises/palestina>



Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) is a pioneering Palestinian non-profit organization based in Gaza since 1992. CFTA seeks to concentrate on and further the values of civil society, playing an innovative and catalytic role in empowering women, advocating women's human rights and gender equality in Palestine.  
<http://www.cfta.ps/ar/>



ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.  
<http://actionaid.org/palestine>

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ActionAid, Alianza por la Solidaridad, The Culture and Free Thought Association or the European Union.

### Prepared by:



Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) is an independent, professional Palestinian research and community development center based in Ramallah and Gaza City, Palestine, and registered with the Palestinian Ministry of Economy. AWRAD is one of Palestine's leading professional multidisciplinary research, monitoring and evaluation institutes, with over 200 researchers in project. AWRAD has been recognized as a pioneer in gender research in Palestine. From gender empowerment to gender mainstreaming and gender analysis, our team is equipped with a host of knowledge, skills and experience that inform our dedicated approach to equality.  
<http://www.awrad.org/>

# Annex 1: Scope, approach and methodology

## Scope of the Research

The scope of this research focused on the following interlinked components:

- Safety threats and security risks, including the violence perpetrated against women, also known as gender-based violence (GBV), the restrictions imposed on their freedom of movement, and the forced displacement of families, as a direct consequence of Israeli occupation-related policies and systematic discrimination perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces, Israeli settlers and the Israeli government.
- Social, economic and socioeconomic discriminatory policies that limit women's access to basic services in health, education, and sanitation; as well as denial of economic opportunity and barriers to market participation. All of these obstacles limit the ability of Palestinian women to pursue their professional careers and reach their full potential.

## Approach

Our approach was based on broad local and international experience in the conducting of qualitative research and projects focused on gender and women. One key aspect is our awareness of the importance of incorporating and honoring feminist values and principles while conducting the research.

The rationale behind using qualitative methods in this study, instead of quantitative, is that a survey can tell us about the impacts of occupation on women in general, but it cannot explain how these impacts make women feel, how their lives are affected and what kind of coping mechanisms they employ. Accordingly, the use of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews was deemed more appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Feminist research is distinguished by a focus on women's experiences and aims to 'make women visible, raise their consciousness and empower them' (Holloway and Wheeler 2013). A principle of feminist research is the amplification of the visible form of power to the maximum and eliminating the invisible and hidden power by transforming these into visible form. Taking a feminist approach to research, our focus was different, in terms of analysis in relation to power, and we employed a gendered analysis of the findings and results. The following are the key principles of our approach:

- Women and gender are the focus of analysis
- Rejection of subject and object relationship with the women participants in this study. Women were treated as experts in terms of the knowledge being provided.

- A concentrated focus on ethics and ethical behavior across the entire research process
- A focus on ways to empower women and transform power relations

These principles were integrated in all phases of our research and all researchers were provided with training on these principles prior to fieldwork.

## Methodology

This research is based predominately on field research conducted in the following areas between February and April 2017. The field research consisted of conducting:

- Seven focus groups,
- 16 in-depth interviews with women and young women impacted by the Israeli Occupation,
- 10 expert in-depth interviews with human rights experts, feminist/women leaders, women's rights organizations, media agencies and young women activists.

The following tables provide the distribution of participants in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews:

Women FGDs and Interviews			Expert Interviews		
	FGDs	Interviews		WB	Gaza
<b>Gaza</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Human rights experts</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>East Jerusalem</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Feminist women leaders</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hebron (H2)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Women's rights organizations</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hebron (Area C)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Media agencies</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Jordan Valley</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Young women activist</b>	<b>1</b>	-

All participants in this research joined voluntarily, after they were introduced to the purpose of the study and an overview of the information being gathered.

Focus groups were organized with the assistance of local community organizations and grass-roots groups and volunteers in the different areas of the research. We would like to extend our appreciation to those organizations and individuals.

In addition to the field research, the research team conducted a desk review of available information related to the impact of the Israeli Occupation on women.

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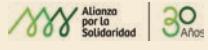
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