

*Permanent Observer Mission
of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations*



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement by Mrs. Somaia Barghouti, Senior Adviser, the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine, before the Commission on the Status of Women, 59th session, New York, 11 March 2015:

(Check against delivery)

Madame Chair,

At the outset, please allow me, on behalf of the delegation of the State of Palestine, to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of this important commission. We wish you and all members of the Bureau all success.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his report regarding *"the Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women"* (E/CN.6/2015/5), in which the tragic situation of Palestinian women is addressed. The report stated: *"expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the critical socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip."* Moreover, it emphasized that: *"Restrictions on movement and access, increased settlement expansion and settler 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."* My delegation considers this report to be very important however, we would like to express our concern regarding how this tragic situation was portrayed as the result of a conflict between two equal parties, Israel and Palestine, rather than taking into consideration that the Palestinian people have been suffering for more than 48 years under Israel's illegal colonial military occupation and its oppressive and racist practices.

Madame Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing laid the vision for achieving gender equality and ensuring women's rights. Since then, the world leaders along with civil society organizations have agreed on the foundations and principles to achieve equality, empowerment of women and promote their participation in various economic social and public life areas. Together, they identified an action plan that includes executive measures focusing on the twelve critical areas of concerns, including: *The effects of armed conflicts and other types of conflicts on women, including women living under foreign occupation.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting today to review the progress achieved and difficulties we faced in achieving of our full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action as well as the lessons learned and conclusions reached in order to expedite the work towards the realization of all the commitments that the international community agreed in Beijing. In this context, it must be noted that women worldwide, including Palestinian women, were able to make progress towards the full implementation of BDPA.

However, this progress has been slow and still there are major obstacles, challenges, and discrimination facing women in many parts of the world.

In this context, it must be pointed out that Palestine, been guided by the BDPA, managed and in spite of the difficulties challenges and obstacles resulted from the ongoing Israeli occupation and its oppressive policies and practices, to achieve concrete accomplishments in various fields towards the empowerment of the Palestinian women, eliminate all forms of discrimination against them, enhancing their roles in the society, and combating violence against them. In this regard, the State of Palestine has enacted laws and amended legislations in order to achieve these objectives. Furthermore, it is an honor to note that the State of Palestine has exceeded in April 2014 to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in December of the same year without reservations.

In addition, all the components of the Palestinian society and at all levels: the government, civil society, and the private sector, and in the framework of full and effective partnership between these components, Palestine, with determination, has managed to achieve tangible progress in terms of the role of women in society. The last twenty years have witnessed an improvement in the situation of Palestinian women and their families in many spheres of life.

In the education field, it is pertinent to mention that we witnessed a large rise in the percentage of girls enrolled in schools. Girls' primary education has been widely mainstreamed towards the enrolment of all girls so as not one girl child will be left out. At the secondary education level, the percentage of girls' compared to boys has risen from 84% in 1994/1995 to 120% in 2011/2012, and the ratio of girls to boys in higher education has risen from 87% in 1995 to 140% in 2011/2012. The ratio of women with a Bachelor's degree has raised to 4.3%, based on the population statistics in 1997 and 2007.

In the health sector, the general indicators of women's health have recorded significant progress since 1995. Maternal mortality rates have dropped and rates of women's care during pregnancy and delivery increased. The percentage of women receiving antenatal care increased (four visits at least) to 94% in 2010, and the rates of births under medical supervision increased to 99% in 2010. There is an improvement in the level of general access to reproductive health services; the rate of the use of family planning methods has risen from 45.2% in 1996 to 55% in 2014.

In the legal field, since 1995, the State of Palestine has witnessed a legal reform process to unify its laws and regulations that will contribute to the full implementation of the BDPA. This process produced several legal plans and programs geared to enhance women's roles in the development and the improvement of our institutions. The most important ones are the Palestinian Basic Law, the document on human rights of Palestinian women, and Palestinian labor laws. Moreover, women have played prominent roles in Palestinian state-building institutions and held many decision-making positions. The establishment of gender units in all Palestinian ministries, the communication centers in all governorates as well as the adoption of a resolution to ensure a gender-sensitive balanced budget came as a result of such programs and plans.

Moreover, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, in coordination with other ministries, continues to implement and raise awareness about the importance of gender mainstreaming in these plans and policies building national capacities in this area. Furthermore, they also adopted an important resolution establishing the National Committee for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which lays out the Strategy to Combat Violence against Women by the Council of Ministers for the years 2011 – 2019, in addition to the ratification of gender cross-sectorial strategy, and adopted a resolution on the

establishment of a higher national committee for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, calling for women participation in peace and security and decision making bodies particularly in armed conflict zones.

In terms of the provision of an enabling environment for women's work, the State of Palestine has taken a number of actions to enhance women's economic participation through providing appropriate and supportive legal environment for their work, thereby ensuring Palestinian labor laws do not discriminate between men and women regarding benefits. Regulations have also been set that prevent employing women in hazardous jobs, and provide women with special leaves that take into consideration woman's special circumstance and needs, for instance; maternity and nursing leave.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite this remarkable significant progress, the current political, humanitarian, and socio-economic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is escalating to an alarming level, due to the Israel's illegal policies and practices undermining all opportunities to achieve economic growth and prosperity has stifled the increase of women's economic participation. The impact of these illegal policies and practices has not only targeted Palestinian families and weakened their ability to withstand crises, but also continue to have devastating ramification on the advancement of Palestinian women and increased poverty rates, food insecurity and violence against women.

At the same time, the Israeli occupation continues to be in itself a huge source of violence directed against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations. It does not discriminate between Palestinian woman and man, nor for the elderly or the child; it executes a policy of racial violence as it murders, arrests, and assaults with impunity in blatant violation of international law and international conventions and norm.

In conclusion, we reiterate our profound gratitude for your noble positions in support of the Palestinian people, especially Palestinian women, towards the attainment of their rights in freedom. We echo our call to the international community to end the illegal Israeli occupation, release all prisoners, men and women, and lift the unjust blockade on the Gaza Strip and the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and the accomplishment of the objective of its full membership in the United Nations and to build together a violence-free democratic society, dominated by social justice and full equality between women and men.

I thank you, Madame Chair.