

Palestinian Women's Contribution to Peace and Security



By Dr. Amal Hamad, Minister of Women's Affairs, and Maryse Guimond, UN Women Special Representative in Palestine

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ore than 20 years ago, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) was unanimously adopted, marking a global recognition of the

disproportionate impact of war and conflict on women and their vital role in peacebuilding. Since then, numerous additional resolutions have been passed, reinforcing the urgency to address violations against women in conflict and their rightful inclusion in all aspects of peacebuilding. Although home to many protracted conflicts, the Arab region is yet to fully recognize the particular impact of conflict on women and to include them in peace- and state-building. And the State of Palestine is no exception. Palestinian women's voices on how they have experienced decades of occupation and how to end it remain largely unheard. However, this is slowly but surely changing.

The change started in 2016, when the State of Palestine became the second Arab state to adopt a National Action Plan to translate the global Women, Peace and Security agenda into concrete steps to enhance Palestinian women's participation in decision-making, reconciliation, and peace efforts.



Four years later, on the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the State of Palestine adopted its second National Action Plan to consolidate and enhance Palestinian women's gains in their quest for equality in decision-making and peace efforts. This renewed commitment, led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and supported by UN Women and the Government of Norway, came at a timely yet challenging moment for the Palestinian people.

Apart from the Israeli occupation whose accumulative impact over the decades has caused untold suffering for countless Palestinians, COVID-19 came to wreak havoc on a worn-out population. Beyond the health crisis that the pandemic caused, many jobs have been lost and many livelihoods severed. Palestine's poor got even poorer. While this has affected the entire population, its impact has been particularly harmful for women whose economic participation is concentrated in the informal sector which was worst hit by the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic has made inequalities even more glaring, and gender inequality intersects all inequalities. If anything, the pandemic has only shown us the urgency to meaningfully implement UNSCR

1325. The State of Palestine's Second Action Plan is an opportune moment to do just that.

During its First Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, the State of Palestine successfully highlighted the particular impact of the occupation and conflict on Palestinian women. Efforts during the second generation of the plan should focus on effectively increasing women's equal participation in their country's peace and security. For example, increasing the representation and participation of Palestinian women in the security sector can help shape security institutions that are responsive and representative of Palestinian society at large, including women. Similarly, the participation of women in managing crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ensures that the response and recovery efforts effectively address the specific needs of all, including women and girls, and leave no one behind. Palestinian women are already on the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, both at home and at health centers. Seventy percent of the frontline health workers in the State of Palestine are women, but only 14 percent of the Council of Ministers are women.

Palestinian women have indeed a right and interest to participate in decision-making and peacebuilding; it affects them, their families, and the future of their country. But most importantly, research shows that women's engagement in peace processes and reconciliation talks brings substantive advantages and increases the likelihood of successful negotiations. Growing

This year's International Women's Day sees Palestine firmer on its commitment to women's contribution to peace and security.



■ Artwork by Manal Deeb.

evidence has shown that women's participation in peace processes increases the durability of peace agreements. When women are included in these processes, there is a 20 percent increase in the probability that an agreement would last at least two years, and a 35 percent increase in the probability that an agreement would last a minimum of 15 years. In addition, women's participation in peace efforts adds a broader range of perspectives and increases inclusivity and diversity, thus allowing for the inclusion of provisions on gender and women.

Yet, across the Arab world, only 32 out of 119 peace agreements signed so far include provisions on gender and women, considerably fewer than the current global average of 50 percent. It is time that Palestine, which suffers from one of the longest conflicts in the world, finally recognizes women's rightful place at the table.

The Second Action Plan also comes at a time when the Palestinians are hopeful that the status quo, marked by political divisions that only made the occupation harsher, is about to change.

They are looking to their leaders to put their differences aside and allow for a new inclusive leadership that can finally improve the lives of all, including women. This is an excellent opportunity to ensure that the voice of the other half of the Palestinian people is finally heard. Women's inclusion should not be a matter of quotas and box ticking. Their concerns, needs, expertise, and aspirations must be brought to the table so that they can fully and equally help Palestine transition towards a democratic, inclusive, united, and peaceful future.



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