

## UNR1325 Conference

The conference is a meaningful and thought-provoking platform for the exploration of UNR1325 and different aspects of Domestic violence during the Pandemic. The key note speakers were **Kifah Manasra**, a Doctor of Criminology Al Istiqlal University (Palestinian Academy for Security Sciences) FACULTY OF LAW; and **Maysoun Kawasmi**, a women activist and key member of UNR1325 Coalition, who spoke about “UNR1325 in terms of Accountability and Protection within the framework of the International court of Justice”. The conference happened over a span of two days.

The conference featured two main speakers, working groups, open discussions over two days. **The first speaker was Dr. kifah M. focused** on deconstructing the causes of domestic violence during the Lockdown and the current Cornina crisis. She said that the quarantine and physical distancing put many at risk of the negative consequences of loneliness, isolation, and domestic violence. According to local women NGO’s, calls regarding abuse and violence, and specifically domestic violence from husbands, increased by 38% for females since the beginning of the lockdown. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and the threat of violence have been on the rise at the national level. Violence against women and children (VAW/C) have severe adverse psychological, economic, and physical effects for women and children throughout their lifetimes.

Psychological violence is the main type of violence women at risk of domestic violence are experiencing during the lockdown, followed by verbal violence, cyber-violence and physical violence. She explained that as women at risk are spending more time with an abusive husband or immediate relative due to the imposed lockdown, domestic violence is increasing; unemployment and

financial hardship caused by the pandemic are sited as main factors that contribute to the increase in domestic violence as abusers are addressing their own depression by abusing their victims while they are at home. She said that the lockdown exposed violent trends among many people who have an intrinsic inclination towards violence and behavioral disorder. The crisis gave this section of people with an opportunity to exercise violence on their spouse and families as a way to accommodate themselves with the crisis and as an expression of the psychological incapacity that they feel.

Kifah said that acts of violence against women and girls are escalating during the crisis because many victims of family violence (i.e., domestic violence and child abuse) were trapped in the home with a violent perpetrator during a time of severely limited contact with the outside world. The disruption of social and protective networks, as well as decreased access to services exacerbated the risk of violence for women. Lockdown, movement restrictions, and the re-prioritization of resources and health services toward COVID-19 response have significantly impeded women and girls' ability to access already limited GBV support, including safe spaces, shelters, and medical, psychosocial, and reproductive health services. In ordinary cases, women victims of domestic violence resort to police, Safe Shelter and "Family Protection Units" for assistance; while, during the covid crisis, all these safety nets were shattered with no existing protection existing for helping women and girls.

**To address the challenges of related to domestic violence, Dr. Kifah indicated that there is a need to:**

1. Devising a national plan to deal with the repercussions of DV; address the psychological and legal needs of women at risks,
2. Provide health and psychosocial support for women, girls, communities, families, individuals affected;

3. Encourage young people, girls, and woman to engage in civic and voluntary work to overcome their ordeal and reduce the repercussions of the psychological crisis;
4. Assist actors of violence through education and counseling to adopt positive behavior
5. Increase the number of free 24-hour helplines to provide support and guidance to women victims of violence and advertise them through the media and social media platforms
6. Stakeholders need to raise awareness about the availability of services for victims of violence, while ensuring their safety and confidentiality. Intervention needs to be holistic, working with the entire family
7. The need to strengthen available services and assess the impact and effectiveness of the referral system for victims of violence. GBV prevention and response must be included as part of Palestine's COVID-19 response.

**The second Sessions was delivered by Maysoun Kawasmi: "UNR1325 in terms of Accountability and Protection within the framework of the International court of Justice**

In her introduction, Maysoun indicated that Women's right to participate in public affairs and protection is located at the heart of sustainable development. This is because women's full and equal participation and representation in public affairs – including, but not only, in political decision-making – are both enabling factors of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Speaking about the Palestine context regarding women participation, she quoted substantial evidence that shows that women's participation and representation in decision-making and public life remain limited compared

with men, where 82% of judges were men, compared to 18% for women, while 73% of registered lawyers were men, compared to 27% for women and 80% of prosecutors were men, compared to 20% for women, in 2017, 31% of members of student's councils in the West Bank universities were females, compared to 69% for males. In the public sector, women represented 43% of the employees, compared to 57% for men. These data shows that 5% of the Palestinian Central Council members are women, 11% of the Palestinian National Council members and 13% of the Council of Ministers members are women. Also, 11% is the percentage of the women ambassadors in the Diplomatic Service. Moreover, there is only one woman who holds the position governor out of 16 governors and three women ministers only and only 4% of women are enrolled in the security section, women also represent less than 4% of the participants in peace negotiations (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 07/03/2021, highlighted the situation of the Palestinian women on the eve of the International Women's Day, 08/03/2021).

The speaker, Maysoon, indicated that women's social and political under-representation stems from several factors: institutional resistance to women's participation and inclusion in decision-making; the cost of campaigning and nature of certain electoral systems that reduce the opportunity for women to compete with men on an equal basis; restricted mobility; fewer resources or time to participate, especially when outweighed by social norms that keep women largely responsible for domestic work and child care; the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes that suggest women should not participate or have a role in public affairs; and violence against women which precludes women from exercising their social and political rights.

M. called for a stronger and more equitable role for Palestinian women in the security sector, crisis management, reconciliation efforts and

negotiations. She indicated that Women represent less than 4% of the participants in peace negotiations with only two women participating in the negotiations (Hanan Ashrawi, responsible for political agenda, and, Fadia Deibies, responsible for the water files). There was also low-level representation of women in reconciliation efforts in Cairo between the two main political factions, Hamas and Fateh. This is due to the fact that men are controlling the political scene giving little space to women engagement and decision-making.

Speaking about protection and security within the framework of the International court of Justice (ICJ), Maysoun pointed out the fact that the mechanism of reporting violations of occupation against women and the protection of women's rights at the international levels is not functioning well as it should. She mentioned three shortcomings in areas of protection and security: first, as Palestinians, we lack the capacity to file reports and documenting violations to the ICJ on violations to women human rights; second, we need to work more comprehensively on writing shadow reports be more inclusive and effective when it comes to women's situation; third, there is a deficiency in rehabilitating women released prisoners in which we didn't do enough to integrate them and empower them to be active at the social, political and economic levels. Even, there are minimal intervention at the international level to portray the voices of women inmates inside and outside their jail in Israel. This is due to the lack of expertise in international law, the complaints mechanisms and the use of social media as she indicated.

M. also mentioned that the Palestinian in general are not prepared to file complaints against the violation of human rights at the hand of the occupation because we lack the resources, and lack of membership in international bodies so that we can file complaints against the occupation. In

that respect, M. mentioned an important point in areas of filing complaints at the international levels: if the PA filed any complaint against Israel to the ICJ, the latter will resort to blackmailing the Authority through stopping essential services in the Palestinian land such as blocking water, transportation, salaries, tax revenues, cutting electricity, etc.

At the end of her talk, Maysoun gave the following points in areas women security and protection:

1. Enhancing the awareness of citizens and women in particular on the mechanisms of reporting and international human rights laws, international discourses to address the international community.
2. Calling for the endorsement of the "Family Protection Bill" and amendments of the Penal Law to ensure full protection of women
3. The integration of gender equality in security sector reform to ensure that justice and security services are responsive to the needs of all citizens.
4. Focusing on Advocacy campaigns to pressure decision-makers and raise the voices of women
5. Increase the quota ratio to respond to women needs to have higher participation at the social and political levels
6. Provide protection for women near the Wall, in jail and female workers passing the checkpoints

### Second Day:

Throughout the second day of the conference various discussions took place between the participants providing a platform for in depth reflections and debates on the realities faced by Palestinian women. The conference

participants were divided into groups (male and females) from different backgrounds, each group focused on the following:

The first group focused on the "**Participation**".

The group empathized that UNR1325 should be used as a tool to enhance the representation and equal participation of women in all decision-making position. They emphasized the necessity to strengthen women alliances, networks as a way to empower women involvement in community and political affairs.

The discussion also touched upon a spectrum of challenges and obstacles to women's effective participation in their communities (i.e., Patriarchal mentalities, unjust laws, election system, economic, occupation, etc.). This group examined Women's role in national reconciliation efforts and negotiation teams as equal partner with men. Participants discussed the impact of conflict on women and women's participation in community change and their efforts to create peace. This group called form more integration of women in mediation, reconciliation efforts, negotiation and stated that the quota for women representation in local council and legislative council should be no less than 30%.

**The second group focused on "Prevention.** The group gave a special attention to the education sector and teachers. There is a need to review and develop curricula on issues concerning human rights, gender mainstreaming and human rights in order to promote democratic values and practices among the new generation.

The working groups pointed out the necessity to organize advocacy campaign involving larger population targeting decision-makers in order to muster local support for women rights, influence the Patriarchal mentality that impede women rights, pressure decision-makers to change discriminatory laws against women and endorse Family Protection Bill. By this we can provide a

legal umbrella that can protect women from gender-based violence. In the discussion, the participants highlighted the importance of social media as channels that women can reach easily to voice their opinion, combatting stereotypes against women and encouraging a culture that respects gender equality.

The **third group focused on "Protection"**. They emphasized the link between UNR1325 and CEDAW as it addresses violence against women and the need to protect and respect women's human rights which include social, legal, political and economic rights in order to motivate women participation on equal footing with men in negotiations and mediation teams. At the level of legal protection, the group identified complex of practices and laws that discriminate against women, starting with penal code. They argued that the structure of the Palestinian legal system does not provide women in particular with the required protection and support to prevent injustices or violence inflicted on them. They argued that Family violence and cases of so called 'honor killing' are not confronted with rigorous intervention from the legal system and the tribal leaders who care only interested in keeping their control.

In sum, the group called for robust of legal protection, and implementation of international monitoring mechanism for measures from occupation, pointing that there is a need for the endorsement of the "Family Protection Bill" and changing laws that discriminate against women.

The **fourth group** discussed "Relief" during COVID-19 Pandemic and its impact on women and the family in general. According to the working group, relief and humanitarian operations that responded to COVID-19, was seriously lacking women participation in the emergency teams and field operations due to gender inequalities.

At the end of the second day, the participants reached a joint Statement. The statement represented the aspirations of Palestinian women to reach full rights and full participation in community and political life.