



WOMEN'S VOICES

IN LIGHT OF ISRAEL'S COLONIAL OCCUPATION AND STRUCTURED APARTHEID

2021- 2022

**This report is produced by the Women's
Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)**

Cover photo: Self- Demolition in Jabal Al-Mukabber

A photo of R. M. and her family standing in front of her house ruins while being demolished
by the Israeli occupying authorities. July 25, 2021

Photo By: **WCLAC**

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

This report is enriched with evidence-based data and testimonies from Palestinian women conducted in the year of 2021-2022, which clearly reveals Israel's institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination over Palestinians which is a clear manifestation of an apartheid regime enforced across the oPt and inside the Green Line. The report aims to ensure that women's voices in light of the Israeli apartheid occupation and its discriminatory policies and practices are well documented and heard in hopes of using them as a material to hold Israel accountable. The report utilizes a human rights-based approach that examines the gender specific impact of Israeli violations on women and girls particularly on how it directly and indirectly violates their fundamental human rights.

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Introduction

Nearly 700,000 Israeli settlers are currently living in illegal settlements in the oPt, namely the West Bank including occupied East Jerusalem. The expansion of illegal settlements by the Israeli occupying authorities is responsible for a wide range of human rights violations, which are in clear breach of the most fundamental principles of human rights law and humanitarian law. These violations include house demolitions, restriction of mobility, systematic settler violence, forcible transfers, the pillage of natural resources, and racial and ethnic discrimination. As a result, the settlements and its associated regime effectively fragment the Palestinian territory and deny Palestinians their right to self-determination.

Furthermore, Israel relies on domestic discriminatory laws and policies to expand its dominance, while continuously altering their use or associated conditions to enhance their settler presence and strip Palestinians of their basic rights and freedoms. In fact, many of these discriminatory laws and policies constitute as apartheid's crimes against humanity under the Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute, which are considered the fundamental elements of international law.

The oPt has witnessed a series of extensive violations and punitive measures as well as domestic racist policies, all of which are directly or indirectly related to settlement expansion and its associated regime. Attempts to repress the voices of Palestinians who either physically assembled and peacefully protested, or spoke up on social media platforms were also practiced through police violence, arbitrary detentions, spyware surveillance, censorship, ID revocation threats, etc. Similarly, a number of Palestinian civil society organizations have faced threats, attacks and even got labelled as "terrorists", which not only jeopardizes the safety, privacy and basic human rights of the members working at these organizations, but the freedom of expression of the Palestinian population as a whole.

The women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling documents evidence-based data from Palestinian women to redress gender sensitivity and ensure women's voices are in the face of Israeli colonialism. This report focuses on highlighting the gender specific impact of Israeli violations on women and girls particularly on how it directly and indirectly violates their fundamental human rights, during the years 2021 and 2022.

Through the process of documenting Palestinian women's human rights circumstances, WCLAC recognized numerous themes that address a wide variety of international humanitarian law breaches and human rights violations that link with the expansion of settlements and its racial associated regime. Throughout this report, WCLAC tackles a brief summary on each theme, the legal context, and women's testimonies extracts to highlight the de facto and de juri reality of Israel's systematic violations and discriminatory policies.

The first theme will begin with forcible displacement and house/structures demolition. This section highlights the Israeli planning policies and the racist domestic laws they are based on, with an emphasis on occupied East Jerusalem. It also addresses tent and other private property demolition as one pillar of the annexation scheme in the Northern Jordan Valley area. The second theme is settler violence. This section addresses the varied acts of organized violence perpetrated against Palestinians in a systematic manner across the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as its recent upsurge, all while settlers enjoy impunity. The third theme the report will tackle is violence, intimidation and harassment by the Israeli occupying forces, including arbitrary detention of women activists and journalists. The violence committed by Israeli police during peaceful protests and assemblies is highlighted, along with the violence in area H2 in Hebron against women at checkpoints, night raids, etc. The fourth theme is Family Rights, specifically the issue of family reunification that highlights Israeli discriminatory policy that separates thousands of Palestinian families, denies women of their basic rights and aims to contribute to the establishment of a imbalanced demographic domination in their favor in occupied East Jerusalem. Finally, the report's final focus will be the prolonged blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, especially in light of the Israeli military aggression and the Covid-19 pandemic. This section will centralize on the persistent denial of access to health-care services, heightened movement restrictions, as well as the psychological and economic gender-specific impact of recent aggressions.

A legal framework is established across all sections, with the goal of reflecting on Israel's legal responsibilities as a signatory to IHL and IHRL treaties and conventions, and contrasting them with the committed violations. Furthermore, through testimony collected by WCLAC field researchers, the gendered impact of each violation on women is addressed and thoroughly pondered on.

Methodology

WCLAC utilizes the framework of international law combined with the gender-sensitive approach and the feminist vision of equality and social justice. The approach taken for this report was qualitative and analytical, with evidence-based data gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are testimonies of affected women collected by WCLAC's specialized field researchers, through semi-structured interviews. The field researchers, whom are assigned a specific geographical area, receive regular coaching sessions on the essential skills and knowledge required in the field, as well as during the process of reporting. All the collected testimonies are revised based on IHL standards and translated by the advocacy unit staff. The secondary sources in this report include researcher papers, periodic reports, and evidence-based information monitored, documented and developed by WCLAC and other human rights organizations, as well as international conventions and treaties established by the UN and its organs. The report is organized based on Israel's IHL and IHRL violations themes all over the oPt.



Israel's colonial settlement expansion in international law

In keeping with its demographic policies, Israel continues its systematic violations against Palestinians residing in the oPt occupied East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip, despite an ongoing global pandemic.

The establishment of settlements in the West Bank including occupied East Jerusalem violates International Law, in particular, provisions of The 1907 Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilians at times of War (IV GC) (1949). One of the fundamental principles of IHL is that the occupying power is only a temporary situation and therefore cannot make permanent changes in the oPt, which restricts its jurisdiction from creating demographic changes that could lead to colonization and apartheid.

Article (56) of the Hague Regulations requires the occupying country to respect the private property of persons and permits the seizure of public property in a situation of belligerent occupation only when it is required by imperative military necessity.¹

Article (49) of the IV GC states that “The Occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory that it occupies.”²

Article (8) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) states that grave breaches of Geneva Conventions are considered war crimes. “The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all, or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory”³

The extensive house demolitions, appropriation of lands, and forced displacement of the Palestinian population that are carried out systematically and unlawfully by the Israeli occupying forces are not justified and therefore considered a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Regulations, and war crimes under the Rome Statute.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Israeli authorities have consistently neglected their legal obligations under international law regarding the protection and fulfillment of the rights of Palestinians. In several cases, Israeli authorities have even undermined or obstructed Palestinian authorities’ attempts to provide healthcare for the Palestinian population. Restrictions of freedom of movement for Palestinians, enforced through settlement infrastructure and the Annexation Wall, combined with the military blockade on the Gaza Strip since 2007, have made it difficult and at times impossible, for people to access hospitals and health care services, and for medical equipment, including COVID-19 testing

1 Article (56) of the Hague Regulations 1907.

2 Article (46) of the Fourth Geneva Convention (IV GC) 1949

3 Article (8) (VIII) of the Rome Statute of the international Criminal Court

kits, or their ability to reach clinics.⁴ Israeli authorities control over planning and construction in Area C, lead to restrict Palestinian efforts to mobilize healthcare services. In some instances, they have even destroyed facilities necessary to address the outbreak, including the demolition of a building in Hebron that was intended to serve as a hospital that specializes in COVID-19.⁵

Furthermore, Israel's violations include restriction of movement enforced by settlement infrastructure and the annexation wall, settler violence, isolation of occupied East Jerusalem, house demolitions, forcible displacement threats, revocation of residency leading to the separation of families, and the latest unlawful and disproportionate military aggression on the Gaza strip in May 2021.

Such unlawful practices have an adverse gendered impact on Palestinian women who must bear the brunt of occupation both directly and indirectly within the context of a patriarchal society, causing a multidimensional oppression particularly in the context of occupied East Jerusalem.

The systematic cycle of international law violations sets out a clear indication of the persistent culture of impunity and lack of accountability by the Israeli occupying authority, and of its failure to respect and meet its obligation under international human rights and humanitarian law or hold itself accountable.

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967, 22 October 2020, UN document A/75/532, <https://bit.ly/3x230Bt>

⁵ Ibid

Displacement: Forced transfer and house demolitions

The demolition of Palestinian residential structures in Area C and occupied East Jerusalem has left hundreds of Palestinians homeless, while suffering from the vigorous financial and psychological impacts of demolition. The latter particularly relates, among other things, to the burdens house demolition forces upon Palestinian women.

Despite Israel's declaration that destruction of inhabited structures will be halted during COVID-19, the demolition of occupied structures continued. By the end of November 2020, 946 Palestinians, including 488 children, had been displaced.

According to OCHA, The year 2021 marked a five-year-high in the number of Palestinian-owned structure demolitions, and in the number of displaced people in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, which represent a six and 20 per cent increase in the number of structures demolished and people displaced as a result respectively compared with 2020.⁶ In 2021 alone, the total number of demolished structures in the oPt is 991 with a total of 1,208 displaced persons. Since 2009 until May 2022, a total of 8,376 structures were demolished, consequently displacing 12, 397 persons.



A demolished tent that belongs to Mona and Yusra from Khirbet Om Al- Jamal-Tubas, Northern Jordan Valley. November 8, 2021.

Photo By: **WCLAC**

⁶ OCHA, West Bank Demolitions and Displacement: An overview, Nov-Dec 2021. <https://bit.ly/3GCQ60T>

In occupied East Jerusalem alone, 181 structures were demolished, with a total of 349 persons displaced from their homes in 2021,⁷ while there was a remarkable increase in self-demolitions.⁸ While in January 2022, 30 structures were demolished, on orders of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Civil Administration and the Ministry of Interior⁹. Twelve of these demolished structures were houses, resulting in the displacement of 71 people including 32 of which were minors. The remaining 13 structures were designed for firms employing at least 45 employees.

Tent's, animal structures, and home demolitions among Bedouin communities in the Northern Jordan Valley have been on the rise, most notably during a worldwide pandemic that necessitates a safe refuge with access to water and other sanitary necessities. WCLAC has documented (12) cases of private property demolitions in 2020, (4) demolition of agricultural structures in 2021, (11) tent demolitions across multiple areas including Khirbet EL-Maleh and Ein EL-Beida, Um EL-Jmal, and Humsa. Each home has an average of four to six women and children that are affected.

Israeli occupation authorities issue demolition and/or eviction orders based on a variety of reasons, the most common of which being:

1. Persons accused of the so called "security-related" offenses and their families are subjected to collective punishment. A punishment for an individual accused of allegedly committing the crime, or of collaborating with the accused, are frequently carried out without any legal process or fair hearing.
2. The 1970 Legal and Administrative Matters Law allows Israeli settlers and settler organizations to claim ownership of single structures or entire neighborhoods, such as in the case of Sheikh Jarrah, Batn El-Hawa, and Al-Bustan neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem.
3. Allegations related to lack of building permits. Less than 1% of Area C is permitted for Palestinians to build upon, and only 15% of occupied East Jerusalem¹⁰. Moreover, building permits are almost impossible to obtain, yet Israel continues to punish Palestinians residing in these areas by demolishing their houses.

Many families, whose homes have been demolished, are left without adequate shelters, and reside in tents, while others seek refuge in relatives' homes. Living with relatives has its own negative impact on women, depriving them of their privacy, and often leading to the further diminishing of women's influence in the domestic sphere, and erosion of their decision-making power. There is also an

⁷ OCHA, Data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank,

⁸ Ibid

⁹ B'tselem, 03 February 2022, <https://bit.ly/3x81QVv>

¹⁰ OCHA, Peak in demolitions and confiscations amidst increasing denial of the right to justice, December 2020 retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3wY0eeR>

increased risk of domestic violence and abuse against women who move into homes of their husband's relatives.

House demolitions are usually carried out early in the morning or late at night. This is especially traumatizing for women and children who would be present during the time of the demolition. Oftentimes, subsequent to the execution of punitive measures, occupation forces conduct a number of arrests amongst family members, including children and women.

Another key negative impact of these punitive measures is the heavy financial burdens they impose on women and their families. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic (2020 - 2022), many men have lost their jobs, which forces their wives to sell or give up on their share of inheritance to support the household's finances. This is true even in cases of self-demolition, a phenomenon that emerged after the enactment of Amendment 116 of the Planning and Building Law in 2017, which inter alia increased the use of financial penalties in cases of administrative construction offenses.

Legal framework

Such discriminatory and punitive policies continue to be implemented by Israeli occupation authorities, resulting in forced relocation and jeopardizing Palestinians' right to exist on their land and their right to self-determination.

In the case of Jerusalemites, failure to prove that the center of their life for at least seven subsequent years is within the borders of the Jerusalem municipal jurisdiction results in ID revocation. The Jerusalemite ID gives people a "permanent residency" status; a status that reduces the right of Palestinians from entering and residing in Jerusalem to a "privilege" susceptible to revocation, rather than a protected right. The goal behind the creation of fragile identities and residency status is population transfer and a demographic shift in favor of Israel; an infringement of IHL, and is even considered by Article 22(2)(b) of the 1991 ILC Draft Code of Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind to be an "exceptionally serious war crime".

The transfer of Israeli settler population to the spaces, houses and neighborhoods Palestinians owned and used to live in, is considered a violation to Article 49 of the IV GC. Furthermore, Article 46 of the Hague Regulations of 1907, and Article 53 of the IV GC prohibit the confiscation and destruction of private property respectively, unless the destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations¹¹.

¹¹ Customary IHL, Rule 51 https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_ru_rule51

Furthermore, as stated in the ESCR Committee’s General Comment no. 7 “the practice of forced evictions may also result in violations of civil and political rights, such as the right to life, the right to security of the person, the right to non-interference with privacy, family and home and the right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions”¹² As well as the right to adequate housing; a right admitted under the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights.

Women’s testimonies

Demolition order/order to seize construction

Ranine Q., Shuqba/ Ramallah

“I am Ranine Q. I am 36 years old. I live in Shuqba village west of Ramallah. My husband, Mohammad, is 43 years old. I have 9 children; the eldest is Husni, who is 17 years old, and the youngest, Ahmad, is a year and a half old. I live with my husband and children in a house for my in-laws, on the first floor. I am a housewife.



A school was demolished more than once by the Israeli forces in Al-Maleh-Tubas, the Northern Jordan Valley. The school was rebuilt again after multiple demolitions. May 28, 2021

Photo By: **WCLAC**

¹² Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7: The right to adequate housing (art. 11(1) of the Covenant): Forced evictions. Sixteenth session (1997), para 4

On 21/03/2021 at 10:30am, while I was cleaning and organizing the house, my son Husni came in a rush telling me that the occupation forces are going to demolish the house we are building.

I yelled at my son: "what are you talking about? What is this nonsense?" He said that 4 military jeeps and a police vehicle are parked in front of our new house. I called my husband who was there and he told me that four military jeeps had come along with two police cars, and that the officer gave him an order of demolition and seizing construction under the pretext that the land is property of the Israeli authority and falls within Area C.

We spent a year and a half building and preparing to move to a house, and live independently, only for this disaster to ruin my life.

When my husband came back home, he told me that we must appoint a lawyer as soon as possible and prepare property ownership documents to stop the occupation from stealing our land.

My husband called a lawyer that works for al-Quds Center in order to follow up on the case. We have been waiting since 07/04/2021. The uncertainty of the situation is very stressful, I am unable to sleep or eat properly. If the house gets demolished, we will be forced to stay in one room with my husband's family and this is unfair."

Demolitions in Humsa, Northern Jordan Valley area, lack of water and forcible displacement threats

Rania A., Humsa/ Tubas Governorate

"I, Mrs. Rania A., am 19 years old, married, I have two daughters, I completed my education until the 9th grade only, and I got married at 15 years of age. Along doing the house chores, I help my husband and his family in producing cheese and yoghurts. We have been living here in Humsa since we got married. I am originally from Hebron, where I used to live in a house from cement. In Humsa, the living conditions are difficult, the destruction of everything we own including tents is becoming a routine; many times we're left with no shelter or a place to sleep."

"About two months ago, at around 2 am, the military vehicles of the occupation's forces army came and demolished everything, my daughters were terrorized with fear. "Sometimes the Red Cross or the Wall Resistance Commission would provide us with new tents and other essentials, but even then the occupation forces would come and confiscate the items immediately. During the last two months, 20 tents and 40 other establishments were demolished in our area."

I, like most women of Humsa, suffer from the lack of security and a severe lack of water. I cannot meet the minimum requirements of hygiene, which has caused my 2-year-old daughter to develop multiple skin diseases. I also suffer from a condition which lack of water can cause further complications including acute bleeding.



A 4 years old child standing in front of his demolished house by israeli forces in Silwan, leading to the forcible displacement of 4 family members. June 29, 2022.

Photo By: **WCLAC**

“Many times I find myself crying and hurting over our living conditions, and on some days leaving the Bedouin life becomes a wish of mine, for I want my daughters to go to school comfortably and for them to find water all the time. But then again, I could never leave my village, our land, we have to remain strong. Having my family by my side eases my suffering.”

Fatima A., Humsa/ Tubas Governorate

“I am Fatima A., I am 23 years old, unmarried and live with my mother and father and brothers and their wives and children. I love school and education a lot, and I worked very hard to complete my studies however I wasn't able to study beyond the 9th grade. When any girl here decides to continue to high school, then that means that she must go to Froush Beit Dajan. The route is long, one should walk an hour and a half to reach the main road then take a car to the village, and same goes for the way back. I still dream about going to college, and this might be the reason why I refuse to get married as I am waiting for the man who will tell me I will marry you and let you continue your university education.

I spend my day like all women in this area, working in domestic chores and producing cheese and yogurt, but unlike them, I help my father sell the cheese and I go with him to many cities like Jericho, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, as I am my father's assistant for all sales, and I have records of sales and purchases for the house, as I love this work and I'm always excited for the sales and purchases day; it fills me with joy and purpose. .

Despite being introduced to the city life, I have never wished to leave my Bedouin life; I love our lives in an indescribable way, and after a lot of effort into saving up, I was able to buy a phone and a sim-card. For me, this is the most important achievement of my life as I was introduced to many new friends and different cultures.

Recently, we fell victim to a brutal demolition campaign by the Israeli occupation forces carried out late at night. It was very cold, their bulldozers destroyed everything, and we lost all our possessions. I stood screaming at the soldiers telling them this is oppression and a violation of human rights, but mercilessly no response was shown. My father was in isolation in his own tent, due to contracting COVID-19, and despite telling the soldiers about his health condition and the need for him to remain safely quarantined they demolished his tent. Their intention to harm us and leave us with nothing was apparent each time they came; it fed into their scheme of annexation the Israeli occupation government recently announced. Yes, they have a clear intention of emptying the land from its people and by force, but we remain resilient. Currently, we live with no electricity, our solar panels were destroyed, hindering many of our daily tasks, and keeps us in isolation from the rest of the world. I feel sad for my children as an unknown future awaits them.

I raise a call through WCLAC to present our case and everything we have endured and are still enduring from forced displacement and demolition of all possessions and the danger our lives are exposed to, as well as to expose the occupation's violations on both a local and a global level."

Gh. A., Sheikh Jarrah/ Jerusalem



A self-demolished house that belongs to M. family in Jabl Al-Mukabber. July 25, 2021.

Photo By: WCLAC

"My name is Ghada A., a resident of Sheikh Jarrah (next to the headquarters of the Israeli police in occupied East Jerusalem), I am 44 years old, married, mother of four sons and two daughters, the oldest of my sons is 26 years old and the youngest is 10 years old.

I have been living in this house for 27 years. It belongs to my husband's family who built it 60 years ago. The Israeli authorities offered my

mother-in-law an open check in exchange of taking over the house multiple times, but she always refuses.

Near the house there is an 80-square meter piece of land that we own. In 2017, we built a new house on this land for my eldest son to settle in when he gets married. By the beginning of 2020 the construction was completed and the house was fully furnished.

In March 2020, the police forces and workers from the municipality came to our house, and had pictures of the house since we started construction until it was completed and ready. They told my husband that it is forbidden to build in this area and they forced us to pay a fine for building without a permit.

In September 2020, the Israeli police handed us the house demolition order, and gave us the option to demolish it ourselves within only a month of the decision, or they demolish it and charge us with the costs of demolition, equipment and workers who will demolish the house. Due to our difficult financial situation and our obligation to pay a monthly amount of money for the Israeli authorities for building without a permit, we decided to self-demolish our house.

A while after, we received a notice again when we built two additional rooms to the old house. At any moment they might demolish it. We live in constant fear and anxiety. Our psychological and economic situation is worsening, and I am worried about the future of my young children, for it will be impossible after the demolition to build the house again or even rent it.

The Israeli forces have put surveillance cameras over our house; they watch every move we make. We are not able to receive guests because no car is allowed to park in front of the house, if they tried, the police will come and cause us trouble. I get worried when I have to leave my 10-year-old son alone at home, since he is studying via zoom due to the pandemic restrictions, so sometimes I take him with me to work so that the Israeli police will not attack him if they break into the house while he is alone.”

Settler Violence

Despite the pandemic and lockdown measures during the past two years, the expansion of settlements and growth of settler population has brought a concurrent increase in settler violence. Attacks of settler violence involve physical aggression, shooting with live ammunition, vandalism of private property, torching of crops, cutting of trees, running over herds and attacks with toxic substances, campaigns of harassment, intimidation, hate crimes and terrorist attacks, all which result in significant psychological distress, financial losses and a perpetual state of unsafety for Palestinians. According to OCHA, in the first 10 months of 2021, 410 attacks by settlers were carried out against Palestinians; 302 against property, and 108 against individuals, four of whom were killed.¹³ Israeli settlers' violent actions go unpunished and are often perpetrated under the protection of Israeli security forces.

According to Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization, 91% of cases of settler violence were closed following an investigation with no indictment filed.¹⁴ Furthermore, because most Palestinians have little faith in Israel's law enforcement apparatus, this percentage does not reflect the real number of cases that have occurred.

Palestinian women living close to settlements, or in areas where annexation and demographic domination is the end goal, as is the case in occupied East Jerusalem and the Northern Jordan Valley, report constant fear of the repeated settler harassment and intimidation campaigns. Settlers' violence impact extends to include the impediment of the right to education, access to land and natural resources, right to life, and right to adequate housing.

In Bedouin communities and villages located in proximity to settlements, girls and boys seeking education have to walk for long distances then use public transportation to get to the nearest school. Nonetheless, various harassments and/or acts of violence by settlers against these young students are routinely reported during such commutes. As a result of this phenomena, as well as the «collective punishment» of irregular border closures and military checks by Israeli occupation forces, a number of parents have decided not to send their children to school, or for girls not to seek higher education.

¹³ <https://bit.ly/3wYQLFT>

¹⁴ Yesh Din. (2020). Data Sheet, December 2019: Law enforcement on Israeli civilians in the West Bank. <https://bit.ly/38DI2lo>

Israeli-settlers are usually armed, which creates “hyper-militarized environment” wherever they are present. In September 2021, in Umm Fagarah village (Hebron), twenty-nine Palestinians, including a 3-year-old child, were injured by settlers or by Israeli forces who later intervened. They also killed five sheep and damaged ten residences, 14 vehicles, and a number of solar panels and water tanks, posing a threat to water and electrical supply. Lack of water negatively affects the health and hygiene of Palestinians, as well as the livelihood of many families, especially those whose main income is dependent on farming.

During 2021, WCLAC documented evidence-based testimonies of settler violence against women in the northern areas of the West Bank such as Qusra, and Bourin villages near Nablus. The testimonies show that women were extremely terrorized and impacted by the systematic amount of terror and destruction caused by settlers. Testimonies of women living in these areas described intimidating acts by settlers against women and their families such as vandalizing houses, breaking windows, burning cars, throwing stones and tear gas bombs on the villages residents, spitting on them, and using verbal abuse and harassments in front of children while threatening people with weapons. These violations not only affect women’s sense of security but also their psychological mental health and their basic human rights. Women in the old city of Hebron, particularly in the H2 neighborhood, are subjected to systematic intimidation and attacks by Israeli settlers. For example, WCLAC documented a woman’s testimony from the H2 area during the pandemic, in which she mentioned that settlers placed unknown substances to their domestic water tank, leading them to go without water for over 48 hours during the pandemic before the Palestinian ministry could replace it.

WCLAC documented women’s testimonials about Israeli forces’ and settlers’ aggression and attacks on women in the H2 district of Hebron’s old city. The impact of Israeli forces and settler brutality on women living in the H2 sector of Hebron’s old city, including sexual and verbal harassment and arrests by Israeli troops, is depicted in said testimonies. With the support of Israeli soldiers, Israeli settlers continue to attack Palestinians in the H2 region. For example, settlers in the H2 region throw stones at indigenous people and their homes at night to terrorize them. Settlers even shoot youth with the full support and protection of Israeli authorities. The testimonies also address soldier violence on women including throwing stun grenades and tear gas canisters on the streets and directly at Palestinians. Additionally, Israeli forces systematically invade residents’ houses at either very late or very early hours for the purpose of interrogating children.

Currently, over 1000 illegal settlers live inside the Palestinian city of Hebron, under the protection of Israeli military forces, among more than 200,000 Palestinians.¹⁵ On 1 December 2021, TV7 Israel reported that 500,000 shekels (\$158,000) were allocated by Ayelet Shaked, Israel's Interior Minister for the "development of municipal services" to settlers in Hebron, a first since the occupation of the city in 1967.¹⁶ During 2020 and 2021, the Kiryat Arba Council has approved the construction of more than 1,000 housing units, in addition to commercial areas and a university campus.¹⁷ Women living near Kiryat Arba settlement testified that they were directly targeted and injured by Israeli forces causing physical harm, deep psychological distress and lack of security.

Legal framework

Israel has an obligation under IHL as an occupying authority to safeguard and ensure the safety of citizens under its control. This responsibility is not limited to avoiding harming the protected people, but rather to taking the required actions to defend them against third-party violence, including violence against their property.

Acts of violence by the Israeli settlers violate Article 33 of the IV GC that prohibits collective penalties and all measures of intimidation or of terrorism, as well as pillage and reprisals against the protected individuals and their property. The unrelenting expansion of illegal colonies, which also goes unpunished, is a major cause of visible settler-violence. Article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute considers "the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory," to be a war crime and a pillage.

Israel also has an obligation under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to protect the rights of Palestinian women including access to health-care services, access to education, and right to work; areas where a safe environment should be guaranteed. In addition, Article 14, paragraph 2(h) of this Convention stresses on the duty of the state parties, in this case Israel, to ensure the enjoyment of rural women of adequate living conditions, which entails adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services, water and sanitation, electricity and safe means of transportation.

¹⁵ AL-Monitor, "Israel settlement expansion risks escalation in Hebron", Nov 28, 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/israel-settlement-expansion-risks-escalation-hebron>

¹⁶ Ibid. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/israel-settlement-expansion-risks-escalation-hebron>

¹⁷ Ibid, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/israel-settlement-expansion-risks-escalation-hebron#ixzz7PTxA0GZJ>

Lastly, children, whom are considered a vulnerable group directly and indirectly by the systematic settler attacks, should in fact be protected by the occupying authorities. As a state party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Israel has a legal responsibility to ensure the enjoyment of children to their rights, including their right to a safe learning environment.

Women's testimonies

Destruction of private property and agricultural lands

Amal Kh., Thunnaba/ Tulkarem Governorate

"I am Amal Kh. I am 50 years old. I live in the village of Thunnaba east of Tulkarem city. I have 3 children: the eldest, Ahmad, is 25, and the youngest, Abdallah, is 17. I live with my husband and children in an independent house, and I mainly work in agriculture.



A Palestinian farm was intentionally burnt by a group of almost 50 settlers in Qusra village southern east of Nablus City. The farm belongs to Nasmiya Odeh, a 40 years old women from Qusra village. May 15, 2021.

Photo By: **WCLAC**

On 21/05/2021 at approximately 3:30pm, I prepared myself to go to the farmland to irrigate the produce and check on it. I reached the farmland and was shocked to find about 50 Israeli settlers in civilian clothing burning the land

and shouting “death to Arabs”. My husband, who was with me at the time, called the townspeople and landowners to come.

We stood far away from them because they were very scary. If we had gotten close, we would have been killed in cold blood. Half an hour later, the townspeople and landowners came, but the Israeli occupation army which later showed up, prevented them from entering their own lands and the fires burned the crops.

My heart was breaking in pain over the effort I had put to cultivate a land I consider a precious treasure. It was a main source of income for me and my family. We had 10 dunums planted with wheat, tomatoes, cucumbers, and all kinds of seasonal vegetables. 20 minutes was enough to wipe down the hard work of months and years.

The settlers retreated half an hour later and we entered the land to put off the fire but nothing survived; everything burnt down completely. This is the first time we get attacked by settlers. They came from Avnei Hefetz settlement, which is illegally built over the town’s land.”

Direct settler violence against women and pillage of Natural resources

Rawan D., Al-Malih/Tubas Governorate

My name is Rawan D.; I am twenty-two years old, married and have two children. I work as a housewife, while my husband works with his father to raise livestock.

I live with my husband in Khirbet Al-Malih, located in the east of Tubas Governorate, about 11 km away from it. Kh. Al-Malih has a population of approximately 356, with an area of 13,000 dunams. To the east of the Khirbeh are the illegal Israeli settlements of «Rotem and Maskiot».

On 3/11/2021, at eight in the morning, my twelve-year-old sister-in-law, Israa, went out to graze the sheep near a spring 300m away from the house. Suddenly we heard Israa screaming. My mother-in-law and I were very afraid and ran out to find out what had happened to her. When we arrived at the spring, we were shocked at the sight of a settler carrying a knife in one hand, and stones in the other. He was throwing them at Israa and the sheep, which caused both of them to fear and panic.

My mother-in-law (Iman), who is forty years old, started yelling at him and saying to him: Why are you scaring the child? What do you want? leave us alone. However, the settler picked up a stick from the ground and hit my mother-in-law on her right foot hard, swore at her and uttered obscene words. We were

very afraid, especially since my husband and his father went to graze sheep and cows in an area far from us.

I rushed to my mother-in-law who was in a lot of pain and couldn't walk and helped her sit down, while the settler went up the mountain towards the settlement of Maskiot.

We continuously suffer from the settlers' harassment and their repeated attacks and restrictions whenever we go out to the water spring or to the pasture to graze the sheep. Three days after the incident, my mother-in-law went out to visit one of her daughters-in-law. On the way, the settler saw her and started mocking her as he stood on the mountaintop and said to her "How was the hit? Good?"

I live in a state of constant fear and anxiety from the repeated attacks and violence perpetrated by settlers. In a former incident, four settlers approached my family and I while we were on a picnic. I was 9-month-pregnant, one of the settlers attempted to hit me on the back, but fortunately, my mother saw him and stopped him.

We suffer a lot from different forms of harassment, including not being allowed to use water from the natural springs, which forces us to buy water, but the water tank has a very small capacity; "three" cups and it barely lasts us for a week. Hence, it is costly and adds to the already existing financial burden we suffer from."

Israeli occupying forces violence, intimidations, harassments, and arrests

In the West Bank, the Israeli occupying forces impose ongoing harassment, violence, and arbitrary arrests on Palestinians. While the presence of the Israeli military forces in the OPT is an integral part of a temporary occupation as defined in the IV GC, its existence is a clear manifestation of maintaining an institutionalized regime of racial domination and oppression over the Palestinians people, through its colonial settlement expansion followed by illegal practices that constitute crimes against humanity and a war crime under the Rome Statute, and further amounts to the crime of apartheid.

In occupied East Jerusalem, particularly in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, house demolitions and demolition notices were followed by an excessive use of force by Israeli soldiers against Jerusalemite residents, and increased settler violence with the presence of the Israeli police. Almost all documented testimonies of women facing house demolitions and demolition threats report exposure to physical and verbal abuse by Israeli forces and Israeli settlers.



One of Israel's checkpoints on the entrance of Al Shuhada Street in Hebron h2 area. Israel is controlling 20 percent of the city of Hebron (the old city) and segregating 33,000 Palestinians from the rest of the city while surrounding them by illegal hundreds of settlers. October 16, 2022.

Photo By: **WCLAC**

During nonviolent rallies in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in May 2021, Israeli forces attacked all family members, as well as activists, journalists, school children, and the entire indigenous community. Residents were shot, protesters were sprayed with wastewater, identity checks were routinely carried out, surveillance was continuous, the neighborhood entrance was blocked, brutal physical attacks were enforced, and arbitrary and fabricated arrests were made during peaceful demonstrations in occupied East Jerusalem against the attempted displacement. During the same time, Israel carried out attacks against human rights activists. Women human rights activists, journalists, female students, and women in general were also being subjected to the previously

outlined attacks and violations. Women have been persistently detained, interrogated, and subjected to harassment by Israeli occupation forces and settlers who aim to systematically confiscate the homes of Palestinian indigenous in occupied East Jerusalem.

Currently, 31 Palestinian women political prisoners and detainees are incarcerated in Israeli prisons, including one administrative detainee held without charge or trial, 14 detainees awaiting trial, 16 inmates serving their sentences, and one minor. It's important noting that the 31 women detainees are among 4,750 Palestinian political detainees. Most of the women incarcerated in the Israeli occupied jail of Damon are mothers who have been separated from their children and families. The ten Palestinian female political prisoners collectively have 40 sons and daughters who are denied their mothers' embrace, all forms of physical contact, and ultimately, their childhood as a result of their mothers' absence.¹⁸ Some women detainees are in dire need for regular medical treatment and specialist doctors to follow up on their cases.

Furthermore, according to Addameer, Israeli occupation authorities prohibit a large number of mothers from visiting their children under the pretext of 'security' bans or claims that there are no 'links of kinship' between the two. All such practices aim to further isolate Palestinian prisoners and detainees from the outside world and exacerbate their suffering, particularly in light of the COVID-19 outbreak and the arbitrary restrictions and prohibitions imposed on family visits.¹⁹

In this section, WCLAC provides some testimonies from women who have been subjected to violence and ill-treatment by Israeli soldiers, in the public and private sphere.

Legal Framework

The general international legal framework discussed in the previous section on settler violence is also applicable to Israeli military violence and harassment.

Israel's persistent attempts to repress and prosecute human rights defenders, activists, and civil society organizations, is a clear violation of Article 19(1),(2), and Article 22 of the ICCPR, and Article 19 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Forms of muffling and harassments include arrests and interrogations during which inhuman treatment and/or torture are often imposed. By doing so, Israel as a state party to the ICCPR, does not respect Article 10 (1), which stipulates "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person". In cases of administrative detention, human rights defenders' right to a fair trial is withheld. Additionally, for Jerusalemite activists, residency revocation threats are a common form of activism suppression.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

In its recent concluding observation on Israel's compliance with the ICCPR, the Human Rights Committee expressed concern about reports of widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment of Palestinians, including children, by Israeli Prison Service guards and Israeli Security Forces at the time of arrest and detention. Physical and psychological violence, sleep deprivation, stress postures, and lengthy solitary confinement, notably against minors and detainees with mental or psychosocial problems, are also causes for concern. It also expresses worry over the low rate of criminal investigations, prosecutions, and convictions in cases of torture and ill-treatment charges (Arts. 7, 9, 10 and 24 of the ICCPR).

In its previous concluding observation, the Committee advised the state party, Israel, to enact an absolute ban on torture, including incorporating into its legislation, such as the draft basic law on the rights of suspects and defendants, a definition of torture that is fully compliant with article 7 of the ICCPR Covenant.²⁰

Article 76 of the IV GC provides that an occupying power must detain residents of an occupied territory inside that territory, however, Israel practices mass arrests and administrative detention outside the occupied territory which is in clear violation of Art. 76 of the IV GC. Consequently, these detainees do not receive family visits as their relatives are denied permits to enter Israel.

Article 4 of the IV GC guarantees the protection of the occupied population, defined as "protected persons" by the Convention. "Protected persons are those who are at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals".²¹

H. J, H2 area/ Hebron Governorate

My name is H. J., I am forty years old, married and have three sons. I am a housewife, and I have been living in the Jaber neighborhood almost all my life.

In August 2021, the Israeli forces vandalized our house while we were renovating the house. In the early hours of the morning, they arrested my two sons, Baraa, 20, and Muhammad 17. They were taken in a military car to Ja'bar police station, near the so-called settlement of Kar'at Arba.

The Israeli forces stormed our house without previous warning, while my husband and I were still having our morning coffee, and I was still wearing pajamas. I immediately told my husband Abu Imad, "Jaish Jaish!" and ran to my room to get dressed. One of the soldiers escorted me to my room. My husband followed him and asked him not to enter the room as he is invading our privacy and safety. My husband asked the soldier; "what do you want from her? Other soldiers stopped my husband and took his ID.

²⁰ CCPR/C/ISR/CO/4/Add.1, para. 78.

²¹ <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/>



An Israeli soldier standing almost inside a house of one of WCLAC's fieldworkers in h2 area in Hebron. The presence of soldiers in this area is aimed to protect settlers whom often harass and attack Palestinians living in this area. March 2021. Photo By: WCLAC

The soldiers invaded my sons' room, woke them up while they were sleeping, and then arrested them. Muhammad was detained until the day after, while Baraa was transferred to Ofer Prison for trial.

Two days later, my husband Abu Imad and my son Anas were taken for interrogation in Ja'bra, then all my family members were taken for interrogation as well. In the middle of Jaber neighborhood there are military checkpoints by which they do not allow anyone to pass without inspection. All my children have been arrested and beaten by Israeli forces and settlers, and this was the reason why they were expelled from school multiple times.

My house was stormed during both day and night. I was attacked on one occasion when the Israeli forces blew up the door of the house using explosive weapons, and started beating my husband without mercy. When I tried to defend my husband, they beat me and I was taken to Alia Hospital for treatment. I had bruises all over my body.

I was constantly feeling anxious and tense, and this required going to a psychiatrist for treatment. The treatment lasted for more than a month and sometimes I still need medication."

Latifa A., Sheikh Jarrah/ Jerusalem

“My name is Latifa A., I am 30 years old, separated, and have a 3-year-old child. I am a resident of the Old City of Jerusalem, and I have been working as a journalist in Jerusalem for 7 years.

On May 18-2021, on the day of the general strike that prevailed throughout Palestine in protest against the practices of the occupation in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Al-Aqsa Mosque and Gaza, I left the house to practice my work as a journalist. I wanted to cover the events in Jerusalem, so I went to the Bab Al-Amoud stairs area (Damascus Gate), specifically Khan Al-Zayt in the Old City. I carried my camera and wore the press ID card.

While I was in the area, a number of Israeli occupation soldiers were assaulting a 10-year-old child in the presence of his father, and they wanted to arrest him. I started taking pictures of the situation from afar, suddenly a policewoman from the occupation police came running towards me, shouting at me in Hebrew and repeating the phrase “go away from here, go away from here.”

She did not give me the chance to speak and tell her that I am a journalist, nor did she wait for me to leave the place and started pushing me hard and pulled me roughly from my head taking off my hijab. Three young men who were standing in the area intervened and tried to cover me so that I could wear back the hijab. I, in turn, hid behind the door of a store so that I could protect myself. An Israeli police force came and started hitting me on the legs while I was standing behind the door.

Another group of the occupation police began to assault the young men by severely beating them with sticks on the head and spraying them with pepper gas. Then they arrested three of the young men who assaulted them.

Attacking male and female journalists is not new to the occupation police/forces. During the period of coverage of the recent events in Jerusalem, they clearly attacked us by spraying us with wastewater and targeting us with bombs and bullets. A colleague of mine Ahmed S. when he was on air was hit by a stun grenade in his mouth, and my colleague Rama Y. was hit by a stun grenade in the foot, which caused severe burns to her.

The assault affected my psychological health. I cried so hard because I was exposed to removing the hijab in front of people who know me, which caused me great embarrassment, and whenever I remember the situation, I get very upset. On a professional level, it did not affect me. Rather, I became more determined to work and cover the events, and for my voice and the voice of the people of Jerusalem to be heard. The policewoman’s behavior was intentional and discriminatory, because she knew its religious connection and symbol.”

Rights to Family in occupied East Jerusalem

Family reunification

In March 2022 the Israeli parliament re-enacted The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order), eight months after its expiration²². The Law, which was first introduced in 2003, imposes sweeping restrictions on Palestinian family unification, affecting tens of thousands of families. Palestinian Women from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank under the age of 25 and men under the age of 35, who are married to Palestinians from Jerusalem or inside the Green Line, are barred from living with their families therein. Those who are over that age limit are only entitled to temporary stay permits that must be renewed every six months without any social or economic rights such as work permits, and health insurance.

Simultaneously, every Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen under the Israeli Law of Return, which was approved in 1950. While the Israeli Citizenship Law, which was revised in 1980, allows every Israeli, whether inside or outside the occupying country, to enjoy Israeli citizenship. Palestinians, on the other hand, are subjected to a complicated and ever-changing set of laws, one of which is the “center of life.” If Palestinian Jerusalemites fail to demonstrate that the center of their lives is within the municipal bounds of Jerusalem for seven years in a row, will lose their “permanent resident status.”

Palestinian women from the West Bank and other parts of the oPt married to Jerusalemites are often denied temporary residency permits and family reunification despite being married for decades to holders of Jerusalem identity documents or Israeli citizens. The practice of residency revocation is the most direct tool used to forcibly transfer Palestinians from occupied East Jerusalem.

According to the Israeli MoI, Israel has revoked the status of 14,701 Palestinians from occupied East Jerusalem between 1967 and 2020, on the claims that their status “expired of itself”. As of March 7, 2021, the Israeli MoI indicated that in the year of 2020, Israel revoked the permanent residency status of 18 Palestinians from occupied East Jerusalem, including 10 women. The claims behind the revocation of the 18 people was due to their absence (outside of Israel) on the date of the revocation.

The consequences of residency revocation often disadvantage and marginalize women. This is done through separating them from their children which endangers their right to social security, including access to economic, cultural, and social services or through increasing vulnerability to gender-based violence.

²² The new law applies retroactively to the couples who filed for family unification or to promote their status and whose requests had not already been accepted, during the eight months that separated the expiry date of the 2003 law and the passage of the new law.

If the husband chooses to divorce, women from the oPt lose their temporary residency permits and are often denied family reunification. If the children have Jerusalem IDs and remain with their fathers, their mothers will no longer be able to live in the same city as them, or even visit them.

In January 2017, a bill was reintroduced at the Knesset to grant the MoI authority to revoke the permanent residency of persons of alleged attacks, as well as their family members. Women are disproportionately affected by this form of collective punishment since men are often the victims of extra-judicial killings or arrests by Israel.

Legal Framework

The Human Rights Committee in its concluding observations on the fifth periodic report in Israel on April 2022 expressed its concern on the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order). The Committee emphasized that the law “continues to prohibit family reunification of Israeli citizens with their Palestinian spouses living in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, or with spouses living in States classified as “enemy States”. The Committee highlighted that “under the Law, occupied East Jerusalem residents are required to either surrender their residency and live in the West Bank or apply for an annual permit for the non-resident spouse”. It also notes with concern that Palestinian women whose residency status depends solely on that of their spouses may be reluctant to report domestic violence or file for divorce (arts. 17, 23, 24 and 26).”²³ Furthermore, the HR Committee called on Israel in its concluding observation to review its laws, practices and policies with a view to bringing them in line with its obligations under articles 23 and 26 of the ICCPR Covenant.

International law guarantees the Palestinian population the right to family life, freedom of movement, equality before the law, and the protection of indigenous people. However, Israel fails to fulfill these fundamental guarantees and directly violates these rights by virtue of the Nationality and Entry into Israel Law. This violates Article 17 of the ICCPR, which prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with one’s privacy, family, home, or correspondence. Palestinian women who have gotten permits and married Jerusalem citizens are not permitted to work in the city, nor are they entitled to healthcare. They are also not allowed to drive a car, infringing on their right to freedom of movement and choice of residence protected by Art. 12 of the ICCPR.

²³ <https://bit.ly/3NlqacQ/>

Article 10 of the ICESCR provides that the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family. Article 23 of the ICCPR also provides that the State party should protect the family. Yet, rather than safeguarding families, Israel prevents them from being reunited and denies them their right to a family life. Under the ICESCR, women's rights to health care, employment, education, and social benefits are all severely harmed.

Women Testimonies

A.B a Palestinian women living in Jerusalem

"I am staying in Jerusalem in an "illegal" way, so I am afraid to leave the house... the police will probably send me back to the West Bank.

When I went to the Women's Center for Legal and Social Counseling, I made the decision to give up my rights in the marriage contract in exchange for getting a divorce and for my husband to allow me to stay at home as I do not want to leave the children and would prefer to preserve the rights of my children in Jerusalem.

Now I am in Jerusalem without a residence permit and I work informally. Part of the agreement between me and my husband was that he pay alimony, but there are difficulties in implementing the decision since I hold a Palestinian identity card. I am required to do a number of complicated procedures put by the Palestinian National Insurance Institute to be able to collect the alimony."

This prompted her to bear the responsibility of securing a source of livelihood to pay the cost of the necessary procedures. She says, "I go out early in the morning to avoid any potential problems. My work is not stable, as I have difficulty finding work without a residence permit or a work permit." and sometimes employers take advantage of such cases as they pay less work wages than they are supposed to be paid.

"I paid a huge price at the expense of my health and interest in order to preserve the presence of my children in Jerusalem, and I am paying more because it is my Palestinian identity." Among the other obstacles that this woman faces is her right to access health services

The prolonged blockade in light of Israel's aggression on the Gaza Strip (2021) and COVID-19

14 years of sweeping restrictions of movement and complete blockade over the Gaza Strip have not only diminished Palestinians' exercise of sovereignty over their land, but has also contributed to the de-development of the economy, deterioration of the infrastructure, and its different service sectors, most notably the healthcare sector. Israeli authorities impose restrictions on the movement of persons and goods including medical equipment and medicine. Restrictions on the entry of medical supplies necessary for cancer patients and other chronic diseases, such as PET/CT and nuclear medicine scanning, are justified under the pretext of "dual-use". In August 2021, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, "had less than one month's supply of 44% of essential oncology and hematology medications"²⁴.



Maryam Qandil, 67 years old woman, owner of Razan tailor workshop standing in front the remaining ruins of her own tailor-shop after it was bombed by an Israeli military missile in the aftermath of Israel's aggression on the Gaza Strip. May 16, 2021.

Human Rights Watch indicated that almost half of essential medicines were completely depleted in Gaza in 2018.²⁵ Consequently, many Palestinian patients living in the Gaza Strip are forced to seek treatment elsewhere, namely, the West Bank - including occupied East Jerusalem. However, in order to do that, patients and their companions, usually family members, are unlawfully required to apply for a travel permit. This even hold true in many cases issued referrals by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

The Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in the oPt, Michel Lynk, expressed his concern regarding the situation of medical patients from Gaza, in his report issued in the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council

²⁴ "How Restrictions on Gaza Are a Matter of Life and Death for Breast Cancer Patients - Latest News & Developments." Medical Aid for Palestinians, October 20, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3anZcCU>.

²⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine>

in 2018, when he called on the Government of Israel to immediately ensure regular and reliable access, at all times, for all Palestinian patients who require specialized health care outside of their jurisdictions, consistent with genuine Israeli security concerns.²⁶

During the COVID-19 pandemic, movement restrictions were heightened. The general lockdown, the almost full closing of Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, and the hospitals' preventive measures all added to the suffering of patients in need of treatment outside the Gaza Strip. The current situation of the Erez Crossing is relatively static, and an unjustifiable number of permit requests are getting rejected.

Further, the Gaza Strip is still greatly suffering from the 11-day-Israeli military aggression, executed in May 2021. During the aggression, the occupation forces targeted among other things residential units, schools and hospitals. People in Gaza are until this day financially deprived; another burden to their limited access to medical services. The inhumane situation suffered by the Gazans was stressed out by Antonio Guterres in May 2021 when he said: "If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza."²⁷

Legal framework

The Prolonged Blockade:

- Despite the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005, the Gaza Strip remains under the effective control of Israeli occupying authorities, more so than any other Palestinian region, and is designated as occupied territory by the United Nations.
- As a result, the ongoing embargo of its land, sea, and airspace is unconstitutional and amounts to collective punishment. Israel claims the embargo is for security reasons, but the actual motivations are political ambitions. Israel is imposing collective punishment measures by harming the health and jeopardizing the lives of 1.9 million people, including women, for activities they did not commit by imposing unconstitutional limitations based on «security justification.» «No protected person may be punished for an offense he or she has not personally committed,» according to Article 33 of the IV GC, and «Reprisals against protected persons and their property are banned.»

²⁶ Human Rights Council, Thirty-seventh session, 26 February–23 March 2018 Agenda item 7, Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. <https://bit.ly/3x7b711>

²⁷ Human Rights Council Forty ninth session, 28 February–1 April 2022, Agenda item 7 Human Rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. UN News, 21 March, 2022, page 14 <https://bit.ly/3m5Ps30>

Unlawful Movement Restrictions:

- Israel is violating its duties as an occupying power by restricting the entrance of medical equipment and medicines, therefore withholding the necessary care or treatment for Palestinian civilians living under occupation in contravention with Article (55) and Article (56) of the IV GC. Furthermore, the complex and arbitrary permit regime deprives Palestinians of their right to access healthcare services. This is in contrast to Article (59) of the Fourth GC which states “If the whole or part of the population of an occupied territory is inadequately supplied, the Occupying Power shall agree to relief schemes on behalf of the said population, and shall facilitate them by all the means at its disposal.” Additionally, the permit regime strips people living in Gaza of their freedom of movement which is recognized as a basic human right and a protected right under the IV GC 1949.
- Enshrined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to health is constantly threatened and violated by Israel’s closure-related practices, including imposing restrictions on trades, infrastructure, water, and electricity.

Persistent Denial to Access Healthcare Services:

- Thousands of Gazans are at risk of death due to a high percentage of denied or delayed travel permits. A study conducted between 2015 and 2017 found a link between cancer patients’ first permit application status and their probability of mortality.²⁸ Patients whose initial application was denied had a considerably higher risk of mortality than those whose first application was approved. This is especially dangerous in cases like breast cancer, where early detection and therapy are critical to cancer elimination. Because there are no alternative routes (crossings), nor appropriate treatment or equipment in the Gaza Strip, the danger of mortality increases the longer a permission application is delayed or denied.

²⁸ Benjamin Bouquet et al., “Comparative Survival of Cancer Patients Requiring Israeli Permits to Exit the Gaza Strip for Health Care: A Retrospective Cohort Study from 2008 to 2017,” PLOS ONE 16, no. 6 (2021), <https://bit.ly/3zboIG0>.

Women's Testimonies

Denial/delay to healthcare access and restriction of movement

Tahani R., 35 years old, a thyroid cancer patient.

Tahani was diagnosed a little over three years ago with thyroid cancer. At the start of her treatment journey, she was granted a travel permit to the West Bank, upon the request of (the Palestinian Ministry of Health), to receive chemical and radioactive iodine doses, which are not allowed in the Gaza Strip. She traveled for the first time on the 30th of November 2018, and it was decided for her to get back and receive treatment every 6 months.

The last time she traveled was in August 2019. She had a new appointment to travel for treatment in January of the year 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, along Al-Ahly Hospital's preventive measures²⁹ in Hebron, she was unable to travel and missed her hospital appointment. As a result, she was forced to repeat the travel procedure by setting a new appointment and a new medical referral (in order to get a permit).

Almost 10 months ago, new complications started to appear on her body, specifically a mass in her head in a critical place/with a critical placement. Which in turn led to vomiting of blood

and nose bleeds, in addition to emaciation, fatigue and exhaustion. Doctors in the Gaza Strip were unable to do anything because of the sensitivity of the place where this mass appeared.

Despite getting an appointment in the West Bank to get the mass checked/treated, she was denied travel, as the crossing was completely closed after the aggression by the Israeli occupation on the Gaza Strip. Currently, Tahani suffers from two cancerous tumors, one in her throat and the other in her breast, in addition to a mass in her head.

Hassan, 14 months old, a blood cancer patient.

When Hassan was 3 months old, his mother, Nora, noticed some health-complications, so she did medical tests for him. It was found that he suffers from hypocalcemia and an increase in the number of white blood cells

²⁹ These measures included a no-staying overnight policy.

(leukemia). Doctors in Gaza tried to treat him, but his body did not respond, and shortly afterwards he began to suffer from pain in his left ear. After medical examination, it was found that he was suffering from an ear infection that had reached the brain, and yellow secretions were flowing from his ear.

When his health deteriorated, the doctors requested a transfer to Al-Makassed Hospital to receive the necessary treatment, and the appointment was booked on the 17th of August, 2021. However, no response was sent to them regarding the travel approval, they were only told one day prior the date of the appointment that the mother's name and her son's are still under inspection.

After eight days, the mother went to renew the travel date because Hassan's condition got worse; his immune system has become very weak, and can easily catch any virus. This is especially dangerous in light of the situation of COVID-19 spreading in the Gaza Strip. He now suffers from fungi all over his body that appears as burns, and despite Nora applying for an urgent appointment for her son, so far no approval for travel or hospitalization has been received. Nora is extremely concerned over her son's health and is worried that she might not be able to accompany him if they keep postponing their travel permits since she is expecting another baby soon.

Mona A., 44 years old, a malignant cancer patient.

Mona is married to Khalil A., who used to work on a tuk-tuk, but due to the difficult economic conditions and poor work in the Gaza Strip, he was forced to sell it. They mainly rely on the social affairs check they are given monthly.

Mona has had asthma for a long time now, but on February 17, 2021, she felt severe pain in her stomach and kidneys, which forced her to go to the hospital. There, she did an abdominal ultrasound test, which showed that she had a cyst the size of orange above the spleen and between the stomach. The doctor decided that she should sleep in the hospital and take the necessary treatment, whilst he examines a sample of this cyst.

On March 7, 2021, the result of the sample came back, revealing that the cyst is a second-stage malignant tumor (cancer). She was referred to Al-Rantisi Hospital - a more advanced and better-equipped hospital in Gaza- due to the difficulty of her case. Yet, to her own surprise, the needed treatment was not available, therefore she stood in front of two options; either to wait until the needed equipment and medicines were available in the hospital or to rush to make an urgent transfer request to travel the West Bank.

During the month of April Mona's request for an urgent transfer got rejected 4 times without giving her any reason, and when a hospital appointment and a date for travel were set, the Gaza Strip went through Israeli aggression during which the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing was completely closed, and no one was allowed to travel, regardless of the reason. After the aggression ended, Mona re-applied for a permit, but all attempts still failed; every time she would receive a message that her name was still under inspection.

Mona now weighs 44 kilos and lives on painkillers. She suffers from multiple complications including pain in her bones, and difficulty standing on her feet, one of her feet is weaker than the other. "I can no longer fulfill my duties as a woman or as a mother, the economic situation and my psychological state are so bad that I am considering giving up requesting a travel permit and seeking treatment, and to accept that I live my days and what is left for me in this life between my family and my children," Mona stated in the last interview WCLAC's team conducted.

Sabreen N., 14 years old, muscle atrophy and soft joints.

Sabreen N., a 14-year-old girl who is supposed to be in the ninth grade, but due to her health condition she is in the fifth grade. Sabreen suffers from muscle atrophy and soft joints, a condition she was born with. Although her older brother and sister suffer from the same condition, her case is more severe. The family's only source of income is a check from social affairs.

Sabreen's condition hinders her movement and physical strength. It is difficult for her to sit, and she is susceptible to injuries from the slightest and lightest thing. In 2007, shortly after she was born, her mother (Samar) took her to the doctor who gave her a growth hormone agonist and set her on a physiotherapeutic plan, but there was no response or improvement in her condition. In 2010, it was decided to perform surgery on her, and was transferred to a hospital in the city of Nablus (West Bank), and indeed, a vertebral fixation operation using platinum plates was performed on her back. However, complications occurred; the stitches started losing up after a while, causing a bacterial infection that led to inflammation. Accordingly, she was admitted to get checked and treated every 6 months in the West Bank.

The platinum plates cause Sabreen an increased intrapleural as well as increased intrapericardial pressure, especially while sitting. Throughout the year 2020, Sabreen was unable to get treatment due to the complete closure of the crossing and the denied travel permits under the pretext of COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the platinum plates started rusting away causing inflammatory cysts to grow on Sabreen's back.

Usually, it is either Samar or her husband who would accompany Sabreen during travel, but not both. For the travel that was set on August 11, 2021, Samar requested to accompany her daughter instead of her husband who was recently denied access to the West Bank for “security reasons”. Nevertheless, her request was rejected, without giving her any reason. Samar did not give up, she re-applied for a permit with a due date to travel on September 1, 2021, yet again her request was denied for no clear reasons. Sabreen’s health condition is only getting worse over time, she is in urgent need of treatment and possibly another operation only available in the West Bank.

Psychological and emotional impact of the aggression

Amani M., Beit Lahia/ Northern Gaza

On Wednesday 12/05/2021, 5 minutes before Eid al-Fitr, my family and I were sitting and gathered around the TV following the events that were happening in the Gaza Strip hoping for a ceasefire minutes before Eid al-Fitr. I was preparing Eid decorations on the dining table as an attempt to change the mood and create a bit of joy for my four children, but suddenly, we heard the sound of a little girl screaming, and women yelling and men calling in a loud voice. We were unable to distinguish what they were saying yet fear took over all of us; we saw all our neighbors fleeing their homes. The street was full of children, men, women, and elders.

A few seconds later, we heard very loud noises of bombings. Our window glass blew up injuring my children and my husband in the face. There was fire and dust and rubble everywhere in the house that we couldn’t see each other. Bombs continued to drop. There were fires as bright as the sun that it looked like it was daylight. We rushed down the building’s staircase. The building consists of 5 floors; in each of them lives a sibling of my husband with their family. About 30 people live in the building. 20 bombs dropped nonstop. We all went down to the ground floor. Our children were screaming and crying and we were calling on our men to stay with us. I was looking for my children and checking if they were all with me.

After the noise stopped, the men in the neighborhood called several ambulances and the civil defense to put out the fires. They were yelling “get the martyrs and children”. The men assisted with searching the place and helping the injured, while I went upstairs to my home. It was full of rubble and shattered glass, and the curtains and the TV caught fire. I was in a state of shock. My 24-year-old son could not stand on his two feet from fear. He had an episode of hysteric shouting

to the extent that he is still afraid of standing near the windows, specifically in the living room. Meanwhile planes were still bombing the Strip.

We own 4 quotients downstairs that are the sources of income for my husband and his siblings. A sewing factory and a cake shop, unfortunately all burnt down and destroyed. Our building is located in front of the square that was bombed without warning.

We fled and went to stay with our relative in Yarmouk St. until the area becomes safe to go back to; phosphorus, the smell of blood, and smoke filled the area. We went back a day before they announced the ceasefire. The situation is indescribable. Our mental state is on the verge of collapsing, our minds keep recalling everything that has happened, and wish it were only a nightmare from which we can wake up. I struggle between my obligation to remain strong for my children and my need for support and relief.

Yasmin R. from Al-Shaja'iyah neighborhood

On the last day of Ramadan, I was preparing biscuits in preparation for Eid al-Fitr that was supposed to be a happy holiday for the Palestinian people, but it was a humanitarian disaster against our people and our children. I was preparing to make my children happy and lessen their stress and intense fear from the sounds of bombing and missiles. The noises were getting louder and louder, and the sounds of missiles were getting closer to us. My children started calling on me saying that they don't want biscuits or Eid, they just want to leave the house alive. I kept calming them down, telling them the bombing will stop and Eid will come and nothing bad will happen. Unfortunately, it was not long before the area became a ghost town with nothing but the sound of planes dropping bombs and missiles.

I carried my children and fled the house with my husband. Our agricultural land located in front of our house was bombed, it felt like an earthquake, the windows were completely shattered, and a shrapnel hit my son's foot. It was nighttime, but because of the intensity of the missiles, we saw daylight from the brightness of the bombs. Dust and rubble entered our home and bedrooms. Trees were burnt down. Then, the Israeli forces threw phosphorus bombs on the area; the dust was mixed with gas - my children could not handle the smell and they had episodes of continuous coughing and itching.

The house is composed of 3 floors, in each floor lives a family of my brother's siblings. On the second day of Eid, we went out and fled our house and we reached the street, and good people took us to a shelter center, as there were no taxis due to the situation.

During the 2014 war, my son was 9 years old and went into a state of fear that led to him develop psoriasis, and the doctor told me that it increases with fear. During this war, it increased so much it spread all over his body and blood came out every time he scratched it. My husband is ill and has a birth defect in his foot, and so our income source relies on social affairs cheques.

The mental state of my children, my husband and I is too difficult to be described. My youngest son is 11 months old and only started learning to walk on his feet here in the shelter center instead of having his first steps in his own home with joy. Our state cannot be tolerated, there is no place for us at the schools (used as temporary shelters) as the numbers are too big, so we sat on the stairs. Out of worry, we would remain standing for long periods. We sleep and sit with no bedding or change of clothes or any other necessity. We are very scared from the war on one hand, and COVID-19 on the other, which we do not know how to deal with in terms of the dense population, with no precautions for safety and prevention, and no water, sanitizers, or masks.



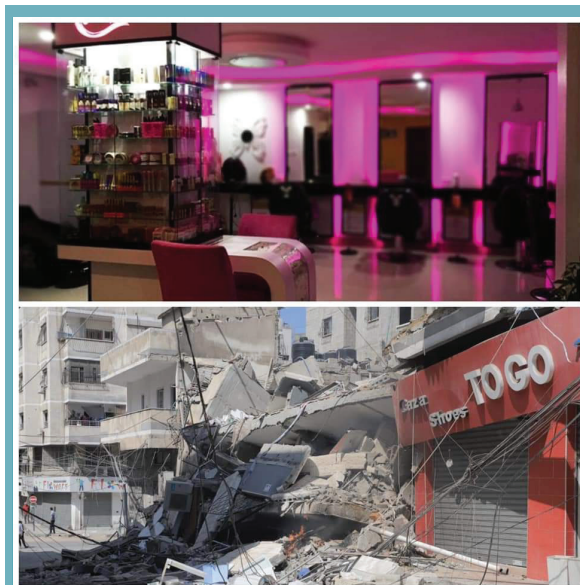
A Photo of 7 women whom used to work at Sparkle Beauty Center standing in front of its remnants. These women lost their jobs and are unemployed as a result Israel's military forces t unlawful targeting of civilian objects the during the latest aggression on Gaza. May 15, 2021.

Economic impact of the aggression on women

Faten K., Al-Nasr – Gaza Strip

“I am Faten K.; I am 54 years old, married and have children. I live in Al-Nasr, near the Andalus Tower, and I own a hairdressing shop.

My hairdressing shop is located in a different area from where I live. When I heard about the targeting of Al-Shorouk Tower in Al-Remal neighborhood located behind my shop, I knew that the shop was going to be affected, but not to the extent of the destruction, I later saw.



A beauty center in Al-Rimal in Gaza that was bombed by Israeli military missile during the aggression in May 2021. The Beauty Center belongs to Shireen Al-Dali, a 44 years old woman. The center was the only income for Shireen. May 15, 2022.

When I heard the extent of the destruction that afflicted my shop, I felt very sad and cried a lot. The losses were huge, the glass and the decorations were all broken, and many of the shop's equipment were broken. I am emotionally connected to the place and the beautiful memories it holds.

I established the salon 32 years ago, before the aggression six female employees used to work with me, and it was a main source of livelihood for them.

Shortly after this damage, I learnt that Al-Andalus Tower, located next to

my house is going to be bombed as well. I still have not recovered from the destruction of my shop and the massive financial losses. I was extremely terrified, and fled to one of my relative's house.

My wish is for peace to prevail in Gaza and Palestine as a whole and for the experience of this aggression not be repeated again, and that we will be compensated for what we lost in the shop.”

Conclusion

The five identified forms of violations extensively practiced by the Israeli occupation authorities in the occupied Palestinian territories reflect on Israel's political aspiration; a demographic domination and an indivisible control over the land and its resources. Further, they demonstrate Israel's exploitation of a worldwide pandemic to further spread its control through intensified practices of war crimes and human rights violations, instead of taking the necessary protection measures towards the Palestinian population.

Many of the highlighted violations were ranked first or second in terms of (practice) rate, such as the demolition of houses, tents, and other private property, settler aggression in all forms, and denied travel permits to seek health-care services in Gaza. In addition, Gaza has been the target of a fourth attack in less than two decades, a war crime that has exacerbated the suffering of a besieged population with limited access to clean water, electricity, decent infrastructure, housing, and medical treatment.

Through the collected testimonies, this documentation report was able to unfold the gender specific impact of Israel's unlawful and discriminatory practices on women and girls. It can be concluded that, similar to the nature of such violations, the gendered impact is indeed multilayered. For instance, laws that "regulate" the family reunification policy impose financial hardships on the wife, as well as psychological ones. It threatens among other things her right to work, to receive health-care services, and to have custody over her children in case of a divorce.

Restrictions on women's freedom of movement, as well as the long and dangerous paths used by women and girls, as demonstrated in section two, can obstruct their pursuit of education, career, and, in extreme situations, reinforce the phenomena of early marriage. Furthermore, Israel's violations exacerbate the gaps in the Palestinian legal system that limit, exclude, or completely obstruct women's access to and enjoyment of their rights.

Throughout Amnesty's recent report on Israel's apartheid against Palestinians, it addressed that; "Israel has created and maintains an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination over Palestinians, which is enforced across Israel and the OPT through reinforcing discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and, when seen as a totality, controls virtually every aspect of Palestinians' lives and routinely violates their human rights".³⁰

³⁰ Amnesty International, *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians*.
February 1, 2022, page 29. <https://bit.ly/3N8cMJl>

On the other hand, the Special Rapporteur has concluded in his report after the Forty-ninth Human Right Council session in March 2022, that; ‘the political system of entrenched rule in the occupied Palestinian territory which endows one racial-national-ethnic group with substantial rights, benefits and privileges while intentionally subjecting another group to live behind walls, checkpoints and under a permanent military rule “sans droits, sans égalité, sans dignité et sans liberté” satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid.’³¹

Therefore, In his report, the Special Rapporteur recommends the United Nations to re-establish the Special Committee Against Apartheid to investigate any and all practices of systematic discrimination and oppression purportedly amounting to apartheid anywhere in the world, including the occupied Palestinian territory.³²

Israel’s discriminatory policies and colonial occupation, which reflect a structured apartheid regime combined with patriarchy, are to blame for the multidimensional oppression that Palestinian women and girls face.

31 Human Rights Council Forty ninth session, 28 February–1 April 2022, Agenda item 7. Human Rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, page 17. March 21,2022.

32 Human Rights Council Forty ninth session, 28 February–1 April 2022, Agenda item 7. Human Rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, page 19. March 21,2022.

Recommendations

House Demolition

- WCLAC calls on Israel as the occupying authorities and duty bearer to reform housing permit process which deliberately discriminates against Palestinians, subjecting them to lengthy and costly procedures.
- WCLAC calls on Israel as the occupying authorities to immediately stop to the illegal demolition of Palestinian homes.
- WCLAC calls on the international community to recognize the rights and freedoms of Palestinian women to enjoy access to adequate housing and family/private life, and holds Israel accountable for its house demolition policies.
- WCLAC call on Israel as the occupying authorities to stop the practice the practice of punitive demolitions and forced evictions, which have a harmful impact on the physical and psychological well-being of Palestinian women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Family Reunification:

- WCLAC Calls on the international community including the ICC and the Commission of Inquiry.³³(CoI) to take into account the gendered- impact of this discriminatory law in your current investigations, and employ tangible measures to hold Israel accountable and ensure that survivors of structural gendered-based discrimination get access to justice, equal rights, and family life.
- WCLAC calls on the international community to recognize and declare that this discriminatory law is a manifestation of apartheid crime.
- WCLAC calls on Israel to repeal this law immediately and unconditionally due to its dangerous repercussions on Palestinian families in Jerusalem. Noting that Israel is the only country in the world that systematically restricts the right of its citizens and residents to family life with spouses from their own people, for no other reason than their Palestinian Nationality.

³³On 27 May 2021, the Human Rights Council held a special session on “the Grave Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem” and adopted the resolution “Ensuring respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel”. The Human Rights Council resolution decided to “urgently establish an ongoing, independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up and since 13 April 2021”. The resolution further requested the commission of inquiry to “investigate all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity”. The commission of inquiry was mandated to report to the Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly on an annual basis as from June 2022 and September 2022, respectively. For more Info See: <https://bit.ly/38Xfliy>

Settler-Violence:

- WCLAC calls on the international community to pressure Israel to cease settlement expansion and exert pressure to dismantle all settlements in the oPt as they are illegal in accordance with International law, and stop the ongoing settler violence and other IHL violations.
- Ensure, without hindrance, access for Palestinians in the oPt to their land and homes which have been labeled as “no-go-zones” due to the presence of settler violence and proximity to settlements.
- Enforce criminal prosecution of Israeli settlers for their harmful and violent acts against Palestinian people as a whole. Call for an end to the culture of impunity enjoyed by Israel and ensure that it adheres to its obligations under the UN charter and international law.
- WCLAC calls on for the prosecution of Israeli settlers for their harmful and violent acts against Palestinian people as a whole.

Access to health services in Gaza:

- WCLAC call on the international community to follow up with CEDAW General Recommendations No. 24 adopted by the Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, on Article (12), which allow access to healthcare without discrimination, and actively promote female health requirements to address the entrenched imbalance.

The Gaza Strip

- WCLAC calls on third states' parties to IV GC and UN member states to impose sanctions and other serious measures to hold Israel accountable for the use of explosive weapons, disproportionate and inhumane violence and war crimes against the Gaza population.
- WCLAC Condemns Israel's ban on the entry of medical devices, in particular those used for diagnosis, into the Gaza Strip.
- WCLAC urges the international community to exert pressure on Israel to comply with its legal obligation towards the oPt to provide adequate medical care and take preventive measures in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19, and actively endorse the principles of gender equality and equal treatment for all Palestinians particularly women patients who are in urgent need for medical treatment.

General:

- WCLAC calls on UN member states and third states' parties to the fourth Geneva convention to support justice and accountability measures including the ICC investigation and the annual updating of the UN Database.
- WCLAC urges all States to dis-engage from all activities with Israel, which may render them complicit, or otherwise contributing, to serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, or the commission of international crimes against the Palestinian people.



للإرشاد القانوني والإجتماعي

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<https://www.wclac.org>

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<https://www.facebook.com/WclacPalestine>



The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) is an independent Palestinian, not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that seeks to develop a democratic Palestinian society based on the principles of gender equality and social justice. Established in Jerusalem in 1991, the organization has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). By forging a feminist vision based on equality and social justice, WCLAC plays a prominent role in addressing gender-based violence in Palestinian society in both the public and private spheres.

WCLAC aims to address the causes and consequences of gender-based violence within the Palestinian community as well as the gender-specific effects of increasing militarization associated with the Israeli occupation. To this end, WCLAC acts not only to reverse historical negligence, negative cultural legacies and discriminatory social attitudes towards Palestinian women, but also, to address the needs of women victimized by Israel's violent actions in the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT). As a leading defender of women's rights in Palestine, WCLAC is proud of its uncompromising commitment to provide legal aid, social counselling and protection services to women in an environment where human rights abuses are rampant and women's issues are regularly overlooked.