

ARMING INJUSTICE WITH IMPUNITY:

How support for Israel's illegal occupation and militarization undermines States' commitments to gender equality and the WPS Agenda



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Twenty-five years after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, women in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) have no peace and no security. The agenda promised a new era of elevating women’s voices in conflict and peacebuilding, a transformative vision of gender equality and feminist peace. But the reality for Palestinian women and girls has been daily, brutal violence for decades under Israel’s prolonged illegal occupation, culminating in the genocide we are witnessing today. Indeed, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women described the situation in Gaza as an unfolding ‘femi-genocide’ due to the crimes inflicted on women and girls by Israeli forces.¹

The briefing paper highlights how the WPS Agenda has failed to confront two major obstacles to peace for Palestinian women: the arming of Israel and militarization; and the unlawful occupation of the OPT which, sustained by international support and a lack of accountability, continues to erode Palestinian women and girls’ rights, protection, and participation in political and public life. It notes that the WPS agenda has at times been understood in relatively narrow terms and calls for States signed up to the agenda to take a wider lens and address the broader political, military and legal context that disproportionately impacts Palestinian women and girls.

The historical and legal context of decades of violence – including Israel’s commission of genocide in Gaza and the escalation in the West Bank since October 2023, and the legal framework of Israel’s obligations as an occupying power alongside the duties of third States – are at the foundations of this policy brief. This paper argues that, for the WPS Agenda to be meaningful in the OPT and beyond, it must be reinforced through binding instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 30, which directly address arms transfers, militarization, and gender-responsive accountability.

By comparing commitments to action, this report reveals the contradiction between States’ support for the WPS Agenda and their ongoing political, economic, and military support for Israel. Despite the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) finding in July 2024 that Israel’s presence in the OPT is unlawful, countries continue arms transfers and defence cooperation. These policies sustain the occupation and directly enable violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including gender-based violence (GBV).

This briefing paper also documents the gendered impacts of Israel’s occupation and recent escalation of violence across the OPT, including the genocide in Gaza. It highlights how women and girls are not only directly targeted – through attacks on women human rights defenders, the destruction of maternal health care, and sexual and gender-based violence – but also disproportionately affected by broader measures such as starvation, forced displacement, and trauma. The paper situates these violations within the framework of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

As this paper went to press, a ceasefire agreement, initiated by the US, was signed in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, sparking new hopes of an end to Israel’s attacks on Gaza. However, this will not be enough to deliver real and sustained peace and security for Palestinian women. That will require not only ensuring any ceasefire in Gaza is both immediate and permanent but also ending Israel’s unlawful occupation and ensuring full compliance with international legal obligations.

It is time the international community, particularly the UNSC and States that champion gender equality, take urgent steps to uphold the WPS Agenda in the OPT. The Agenda must be reclaimed as a transformative framework, one that addresses not only the visible impacts of war, but also the root causes of conflict, including occupation, impunity, and militarization.

This briefing paper incorporates primary material and key informant interviews (KIIs), combined with case studies to ensure that the information and analysis is grounded in the lived realities of people in the OPT. The KIIs have been conducted in line with Oxfam’s guidelines and methodology. The KIIs will also be used to inform related campaign work. Geographically, this paper covers WPS issues in the OPT (West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip).

The paper draws on Oxfam’s research track record, including thematic reports and publications, as well as statements and position papers (including those issued in relation to the ICJ and UN General Assembly resolutions). The authors have made effort to utilize material by Oxfam’s partners, including reports and case studies, as appropriate, as well as UN assessments and reports on the current situation and its impact. In engaging authors from Palestine combined with KIIs with representatives of conflict affected communities living under occupation, this paper reflects Oxfam’s efforts to adopt a de-colonial approach to evidence-driven action research.² The gendered nature of the methodology and the analysis reflect feminist critical theory approaches. In applying these, Oxfam has looked to produce research that examines root causes and drivers of human suffering (e.g. militarism, and non-compliance with International Humanitarian Law); contributes to epistemic justice; reflects and elevates knowledge generated through lived experience; and articulates global solidarity with those affected in the OPT. This methodology engages Palestinian voices, as well as global expertise³ in articulating how the WPS Agenda manifests itself in the OPT.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE WPS AGENDA IN THE CONTEXT OF ISRAEL’S ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

October 2025 marks 25 years since a landmark moment in international efforts to promote the rights of women and girls in conflict: when the UNSC passed resolution 1325 (2000) that launched the WPS Agenda.⁴ This was the first stand-alone resolution to recognize the crucial role of women in peacebuilding and the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls. It was adopted by UN Member States following campaigning by civil society organisations, including feminist movements and humanitarian actors.

The WPS Agenda consists of four pillars:



In the OPT, where Palestinians face a situation of protracted, systematic discrimination, as well as extreme, routine violence and dispossession, the sort of narrow, technical focus that is common in WPS analyses is ineffective. Focusing on technocratic issues is also impossible amid flagrant international law violations. Instead, what is needed is real engagement with the political realities and the main obstacles to Palestinian peace and security: namely Israel’s illegal occupation and the continuing supply of arms from other States that enable it to bomb and inflict daily violence on Palestinian women and girls with impunity.

The WPS Agenda

Participation: Women’s participation must not be limited to peace negotiations but ensured in all aspects related to the WPS Agenda. This includes carrying out a gendered analysis of conflict to design appropriate responses, and ensuring women’s participation in prevention efforts, peacebuilding and decision-making through the conflict cycle, to ensure that decisions are not gender blind. This requires women’s public and political participation in various fields.

Prevention: This highlights the responsibility of States to prevent conflict, sustain peace and prevent all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and to engage women in conflict prevention to ensure that their experiences and knowledge are central to these efforts.

Protection: This refers to protection of the rights of women and girls during and after conflict, including protection from all forms of gender-based violence. States must eliminate gender-based violations in pre-conflict and post-conflict periods and enhance accountability measures.

Relief and recovery: This focuses on women’s specific relief needs during conflict: repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. Women’s participation in the design and implementation of policies and the mechanisms of relief and recovery is paramount.

States are responsible for implementing all four pillars at national level and inter-State level, under their international law obligations.

Failures of the UN Security Council

The UNSC has failed to address the impacts of Israel's illegal occupation on women and girls in its resolutions, despite its responsibility for peace and security and its WPS Agenda.⁵

Since 2000, the UNSC has adopted nine further resolutions on the WPS Agenda.⁶ However, none of these explicitly refers to military occupation, such as Israel's illegal occupation of the OPT, as an obstruction to achieving peace and security.

This is inconsistent with the UNSC's own Resolutions specifically on the OPT, which do assert that policies and practices under Israel's illegal occupation are a barrier to peace.⁷ Importantly, the ICJ considers that the Israel-Palestine conflict poses a threat to international peace and security,⁸ and that the realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination – including their right to an independent and sovereign State, as envisaged in resolutions of both the Security Council and UN General Assembly (UNGA) – would contribute to stability in the region.⁹

On multiple occasions, the UNSC has described the highly gendered and persistent conflict dynamics in the OPT that systematically deny women's rights and agency across the WPS pillars. This is seen in regular reports by the UN Secretary General, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN human rights expert mechanisms, all of which include analysis of the impacts of Israel's illegal occupation on Palestinian women and girls.¹⁰

Despite this, the Security Council has not specifically addressed the gendered aspects of these violations in its resolutions – including the four resolutions adopted since Israel's destructive military campaign on Gaza since October 2023.¹¹ For example, Resolution 2720 (December 2023) only refers to women in one preambular clause, rather than in any operative paragraphs. That clause reaffirms the Security Council's strong concern 'for the disproportionate effect that the conflict is having on the lives and well-being of children, women, and other civilians in vulnerable situations'.¹²

A long history of violence against women and girls

In February 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights summarized the situation as follows: 'For 58 years, Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been suffocating under Israel's occupation. They have been denied their most basic human rights, from the right to self-determination, to freedom of movement, to an adequate standard of living. In Gaza, they have been subjected to

years of blockade amidst frequent military escalations. In the West Bank, illegal settlements and violence have been growing for decades, with a significant increase over the past three years. Most of these violations have gone unpunished'.¹³



Hiba, 27, from Gaza stands at the window of her demolished house. Her first husband was killed during the 2021 war, leaving her with two children. She later remarried, but her second husband was also killed during the Israeli war on Gaza in 2023. From her second marriage, she had two more children. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

Since October 2023, the Israeli military assault has turned the Gaza Strip into 'a wasteland of rubble and human remains', as described by a number of UN human rights experts.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that between 7 October 2023 and 1 October 2025, 66,148 Palestinians were killed in Gaza and 168,716 injured.¹⁴ At least 90% of Gaza's population has been forcibly displaced, often multiple times.¹⁵ Oxfam's own analysis of the situation on the ground, mirrors the conclusion of international human rights experts and the UN rapporteur on the OPT that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza (see below, on the legal and policy context).¹⁶

The October 7th attacks by Hamas and Palestinian armed groups killed over 1,200 people in Israel, including at least 282 women and 36 children – the deadliest day in Israel's history. Around 240 people were taken hostage, with 48 reportedly held in Gaza till 13 October 2025, from which 20 were still alive and released during the hostage-prisoner exchange as part of the first stage of the ceasefire agreement reached between Israel and Hamas.¹⁷

During and after October 2023, Israeli forces conducted arbitrary and unlawful mass arrests of thousands of Palestinians, including women and children. Many Palestinian detainees have been subjected to torture and inhuman treatment, including sexual abuse.¹⁸

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, attacks by Israeli forces and Israeli settlers continue to escalate, with devastating impacts on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians. According to OHCHR, Israeli forces have often used unnecessary or disproportionate force, including lethal force against Palestinian civilians. During the first half of 2025 alone, there were 757 settler attacks that resulted in Palestinian casualties or property damage – a 13% increase on the same period in 2024.¹⁹ From 7 October 2023 to 28 September 2025, 1,001 Palestinians, including 212 children, were killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, according to OCHA's database.²⁰

All of this must be seen in the context of a long history of violence against Palestinian women and girls. The vast majority of Israel's violations of international law in the OPT are not new: they are the latest chapter in a long history of forced displacement of Palestinians from their land and homes over many decades.²¹ Since the start of the the Israeli occupation in 1967, unlawful practices by Israeli forces as noted by the UN Human Rights Council include expropriating land, establishing illegal Israeli settlements, annexing East Jerusalem, and many others.²²

DURING 1948 750,000 PALESTINIANS

WERE FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES

Violations of the rights of Palestinian women and girls have been taking place since the start of the illegal occupation in 1967 and are grounded in the **Nakba** ('catastrophe' in Arabic), which refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, when an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their homes, lands and communities, never able to return. But, throughout this, Palestinian women-led and women's human rights organizations have remained the embodiment of Sumud, translated as 'steadfastness' or 'resilience'.

The concept of Sumud

Sumud, a common term in Arabic, is generally translated as 'steadfastness' or 'resilience'. Sumud enables Palestinians to overcome adversity and to restart and rebuild their lives, as they have demonstrated throughout waves of mass displacement since the Nakba.

Palestinian women-led and women's human rights organizations are the embodiment of Sumud. They continually find ways to adapt and start over, and to enable women, their families and communities to remain steadfast even in the face of appalling

conditions. For example, after October 2023, women's groups started several education initiatives in Gaza to offer learning, play and psychological respite for children.²³

Other women-led initiatives include managing and coordinating humanitarian projects, with an emphasis on protection needs; working to improve safety in shelters for displaced people; and providing mental health and psychosocial support through individual, group, self-care and family counselling sessions. Women's organizations are implementing economic empowerment and income-generating initiatives to help women gain financial support and independence and providing support in legal and civil affairs cases. Grassroots activists are also engaging community members in addressing gender-based violence against women and girls.²⁴ However, such women's rights defenders have been put under administrative detention by Israel, which means arbitrary detention without charge or trial, for an undefined period, in an attempt to undermine their work.

The UNSC's approach to Israel's illegal occupation²⁵ and the impact on Palestinian women and girls is clearly not consistent with the WPS Agenda. This paper demonstrates how it and other actors must address the occupation as a major obstacle to gender justice and to realizing the human rights of women and girls in the OPT.

The report also argues that military and arms transfers by key UNSC members and other UN members are undermining the protection of women and girls, eroding women's rights, and contradicting their own commitments to the WPS Agenda, while ultimately contributing to unlawful occupation and serious violations of international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.



Alya Mlahat from Jericho helps her sister in her homework. Alya lives in Arab Al Mlahat community threatened to be forcibly displaced because of the increasing settler violence. Photo by: Suhaib Jarrar

2. THE LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT



Alya Mlahat from Jericho milks the goat at her home with her brother. Alya lives in Arab Al Mlahat community threatened to be forcibly displaced because of the increasing settler violence. Photo by: Suhaib Jarrar

As the occupying power, Israel is bound by international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law, while States have obligations to ensure respect for international law by Israel, prevent violations or abuses, and punish perpetrators.²⁶

This section sets out relevant aspects of that international law so that the violations by Israeli authorities documented in this report – and the actions of States in support of Israel's illegal occupation and militarization – can be fully understood and assessed in the light of these obligations.

A key argument in this report is that States must fulfil all their international obligations as an integral part of the WPS Agenda. That means acting on and incorporating binding instruments such as the **Arms Trade Treaty** (ATT) and **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 30, which directly address arms transfers, militarization, and gender-responsive accountability.

Security Council Resolutions adopted under the WPS Agenda do not set new standards; rather they affirm the importance of compliance with existing international law and standards in situations of conflict. For example, Security Council Resolution 2242, adopted on 2015 on the 15th anniversary of the WPS Agenda, affirms the primary role of States to implement fully the WPS Resolutions and 'the obligations of States and all parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, and the need to end all violations of international humanitarian law and all violations and abuses of human rights'.²⁷

Israel and third States' obligations under international law

International humanitarian law (IHL):

Particularly relevant to this report are the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War²⁸ and Rules of Customary IHL.²⁹ Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions requires Parties to the Convention to 'undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances'. This means it is not enough for States to respect IHL themselves, they must also ensure that IHL is respected by others who are parties to conflict.

International human rights law (IHRL):

Treaties that are ratified by Israel as the occupying power, and those ratified by the State of Palestine, apply in the OPT at the same time as IHL. CEDAW is particularly relevant to the WPS Agenda, as stressed by the UNSC resolutions.

International criminal law:

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) grants the Court jurisdiction over four main crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression.³⁰ The ICC tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community.

The Genocide Convention:

States have clear obligations under Article 1 of the Genocide Convention to prevent and punish acts of genocide.³¹ This requires States to take all possible measures to prevent genocide from happening or continuing. In the case of Israel's illegal occupation, this includes imposing sanctions and stopping military assistance to Israel which may be used in committing genocide. Article IV of the Genocide Convention requires States to ensure that those responsible for genocide are punished.

Genocide in Gaza

Over the past two years, several third States, UN human rights expert bodies including the UN Commission of Inquiry³², legal scholars, national and international human rights and humanitarian organizations, and Oxfam's own analysis of the situation on the ground have concluded that Israel is **committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza**.³³ In the 'Anatomy of a Genocide' report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the OPT found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold has been met and that Israel is committing genocide.³⁴

In addition, the International Association of Genocide Scholars adopted a resolution on 31 August 2025, in which it declared that 'Israel's policies and actions in Gaza meet the legal definition of genocide in Article II of the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)'; and that 'Israel's policies and actions in Gaza constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity as defined in international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court'.³⁵

UN human rights experts have warned that the world is facing the most profound crisis since the end of World War II, when the undertaking 'Never Again' was made. Their concerns over rights violations globally had been growing after mass atrocities during the 1990s, including the Rwandan genocide. Recently, they noted, 'one year since the 7 October attack by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups against Israel, the world has seen a brutal escalation of violence, resulting in genocidal attacks, ethnic cleansing and collective punishment of Palestinians, which risks breaking down the international multilateral system'.³⁶

In the case filed before the ICJ by South Africa against Israel on Application of the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip (South Africa's Application),³⁷ the ICJ has issued three Orders on provisional measures requiring Israel to prevent acts of genocide and ensure humanitarian assistance.³⁸

Oxfam and international experts and organisations are clear that **the protection of international law must relate to everyone, everywhere, without exception.**



Fidaa Shurrab, Director of Projects at Atfaluna for Deaf Society in Rafah stands in front of a destroyed building in Gaza strip while going to work. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

Atrocity crimes:

The term ‘atrocity crimes’ refers to the international crimes of genocide³⁹, crimes against humanity and war crimes. States have clear legal obligations not to commit these crimes and to prevent atrocity crimes from being committed. This is particularly important considering their irreversibility. Definitions and obligations related to these crimes are found in the Rome Statute of the ICC.

The Arms Trade Treaty:⁴⁰

Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019) adopted under the WPS Agenda refers to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), noting Article 7(4) in particular. This requires any exporting State that is party to the treaty to take into account the risk that arms are ‘being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children’.⁴¹ Article 6(3) of the ATT requires that a State should not authorize the export of military goods ‘if it has knowledge at the time of authorization that the arms or items would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, attacks directed against civilian objects or civilians protected as such, or other war crimes as defined by international agreements to which it is a Party’.⁴²

The ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Occupied Palestinian Territory of July, 2024

The landmark 2024 ICJ Advisory Opinion has determined that Israel’s continued presence in the OPT is unlawful and that Israel is under an obligation to bring its unlawful presence to an end as rapidly as possible.⁴³

Crucially, it outlined that all States are under an obligation not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the OPT; not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation; and must ensure that any impediment resulting from the illegal presence of Israel in the OPT to the exercise of the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination must be brought to an end. In addition, the Court required States to distinguish in their dealings between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (occupied since 1967), to cooperate – including through the United Nations – to end the unlawful presence, and to refrain from any conduct implying recognition of or contributing to changes in the status, demographic composition or natural resources of the occupied territory.

States’ obligations with respect to UN inquiries

The ICC opened an investigation into the Situation in the State of Palestine in March 2021⁴⁴ and received a further referral from five States Parties – Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoros, Djibouti and South Africa – of the Situation in the State of Palestine in November 2023.⁴⁵

On 26 January 2024, the ICJ ordered six provisional measures including for Israel to ‘refrain from acts under the Genocide convention, prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide, and take immediate and effective measures to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza’. Crucially, the Court also ordered Israel to preserve evidence of genocide and to submit a report to the Court, within one month, of all measures taken in line with its order.⁴⁶ Similar provisional measures were made by the ICJ in the subsequent two orders in March 2024 and May 2024.⁴⁷

The ICJ is yet to give its ruling on whether Israel’s conduct in the Gaza Strip amounts to violations of the Genocide Convention.⁴⁸ However, States must not wait for the ICJ ruling to act. They remain under an immediate duty, according to the ATT, to assess the legality of continued arms transfers to Israel, including the risk that such transfers could be used to commit or continue committing genocide. In parallel, as UN Member States, they are also bound by their commitments under the WPS Agenda, which requires

action in response to violations committed in the OPT. An OHCHR paper says: ‘Gender-based violence and harms are not isolated incidents but rather part of broader patterns of discriminatory violations and crimes perpetrated within a system of oppression and domination imposed by Israel as the occupying power’.⁴⁹ According to OHCHR, there was a significant increase in sexual and gender-based crimes perpetrated against Palestinians by Israeli forces since October 2023.⁵⁰

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women described the situation in Gaza as an unfolding ‘femi-genocide’ due to the extreme scale of destruction and the intentional and gendered nature of the crimes being inflicted on women and girls by Israeli forces.⁵¹



Amal Khreisheh, Director of the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, has dedicated her life to amplifying Palestinian women’s voices in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Turning pain, occupation and conflict into collective feminist power for justice, safety and equality in Palestine. Photo by Suhaib Jarrar

Commitments under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly stressed that Israel, as the occupying power, is obliged to implement CEDAW in the OPT. Other human rights treaty bodies have said the same, as has the ICJ in its Advisory Opinion on the OPT.⁵² The CEDAW Committee puts strong emphasis on the link between the WPS Agenda and the substantive obligations of States under CEDAW.

This is reflected in its recent General Recommendations, including:

General Recommendation # 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations:⁵³

This stresses the relevance of the WPS Agenda in situations of foreign occupation. States must place implementation of the WPS Agenda into the broader framework of implementation of CEDAW and focus on the prevention of conflict and all forms of violence. The Recommendation stresses that gender-blind conflict prevention measures cannot adequately predict and prevent conflict. It also highlights the need to ensure the participation of female stakeholders and use a gendered analysis of conflict to design appropriate responses. States must also prevent, investigate and punish all forms of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence perpetrated by State and non-State actors, and implement a policy of zero tolerance.⁵⁴ The Committee emphasizes the importance of States reporting to it on the implementation of the WPS Agenda. This is significant as the Security Council does not have a reporting mechanism.

General Recommendation # 35 on violence against women:⁵⁵

This highlights that gender-based violence against women is exacerbated by political, economic and social crises, civil unrest and humanitarian emergencies. It is affected by militarization, foreign occupation, armed conflict, a high crime rate and pervasive impunity, which may increase in situations of armed conflict or heightened insecurity. This is evidenced in the contexts of displacement and migration. States must therefore implement protective measures and accountability mechanisms.



Across borders, languages, and struggles — women from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen came together in Amman to demand a Women, Peace & Security agenda grounded in accountability, justice, and demilitarization. Photo by: Suhaib Jarrar

General Recommendation # 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making:⁵⁶

States must address the fact that women remain structurally and significantly underrepresented in peacebuilding efforts at domestic and international levels.

Obligations on sexual and gender-based violence

Security Council Resolutions adopted under the WPS Agenda highlight the importance of States protecting women and girls from the impact of conflict, including sexual and gender-based violence, and preventing such violence. Sexual and gender-based violence are addressed in Security Council Resolutions, the ATT, and the ICC Statute as follows:

UNSC Resolutions of the WPS Agenda:

Specifically, UNSC 1325 (2000) calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.⁵⁷ Resolution 2467 (2019) acknowledges that sexual and gender-related crimes are among the most serious crimes, stressing that acts of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict can be used as part of strategic objectives, ideology, and as a tactic by parties to the conflict. It calls upon all States to ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence receive the care and support they need.⁵⁸ Earlier, Resolution 1820 (2008) highlighted that sexual violence is used as ‘a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group’.⁵⁹



Marwa, from Gaza is doing the laundry and home chorus in her shelter in a school in Gaza. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

The ATT:

Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019), which also refers to Article 7(4) of the ATT, calls on States to demonstrate consistent and rigorous commitment and political will to prevent sexual violence and enforce accountability, cautioning that inaction and impunity for these crimes can send a message that such crimes are tolerated.⁶⁰

The ICC Statute:

Gender-based violence in international criminal law relates to all crimes under the jurisdiction of the ICC. Crimes of rape, sexual slavery, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity may constitute a war crime and crime against humanity.⁶¹

Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policies and the WPS Agenda

Several States have adopted Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs), or what have recently become known as Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policies (IFFPs),⁶² to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, grounded in obligations under international law. Both the CEDAW Committee and Oxfam are clear that in both domestic and foreign policy, States must recognize that discrimination against women intersects with other forms of discrimination.⁶³

States also need to prioritize assessment of the gendered

impacts of weapons transfers and of diverting resources towards militarization and away from efforts to promote gender justice and women’s rights.⁶⁴ Article 26 of the UN Charter stresses that effective steps must be taken to ‘promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources’.⁶⁵ Together, IFFPs and the WPS Agenda have the potential to shift States’ peace and security approaches to focus on gender-transformative development.

In their actions related to Palestinian women, States must adopt an IFFP and assess the impacts that arming Israel has on Palestinian women and girls, such as whether doing so promotes or maintains toxic masculinity and patriarchal norms, in direct contradiction of the WPS Agenda. They must consider whether their relationships with both Israel and the OPT promote or hinder gender equality.

Militarization and patriarchy in the OPT

Militarization, including military occupation, maintains patriarchal structures. It diverts public resources away from the things women depend on – such as health, education and social security.⁶⁶

The Israeli occupation also has a major impact on maintaining patriarchal gender norms within Palestinian society. It embeds and empowers the patriarchy as an institution of control,⁶⁷ while the occupation is instrumentalized within Palestinian society to justify patriarchal social structures and norms as a means of ‘protecting and defending women and the family’.⁶⁸

The CEDAW Committee recognizes that, in the OPT, this is reflected in ‘the persistence of discriminatory stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, which perpetuate the subordination of women’.⁶⁹ As a result of the extreme violence and destruction caused by the Israeli occupation, opportunities for political and social peacebuilding are severely constrained, and voices that challenge gender-based stereotypes, such as women-led Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and activists, are suppressed.

As one observer puts it: ‘This is one of militarism’s most insidious consequences – it narrows the space for alternatives to violence and warfare, making them far more difficult to pursue, though not beyond reach’.⁷⁰

3. HOW STATES SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S MILITARY ACTION DISCREDITS THEIR COMMITMENT TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS



An Israeli soldiers evicting a Palestinian from her home. Photo by REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman

Common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions requires States to respect and ensure respect of IHL. Transferring arms to a party committing serious violations of IHL, including acts of gender-based violence, is not compatible with this obligation. Article 6(3) of the ATT prohibits transfers where a State has knowledge at the time of authorisation that arms will be used to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious international law crimes. There is sufficient evidence of such crimes for this prohibition to apply. Article 7 of the ATT requires states not to transfer arms to Israel if there is a serious risk of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity or serious violations of international human rights law, including serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.

Yet many States, including permanent members of the UNSC, maintain arms trade and cooperation with Israel even though they have publicly declared their commitment to the WPS Agenda and to gender equality in their foreign policy. At the same time, several States with IFFPs or other similar commitments have been funding the Palestinian Authority (PA), civil society and UN agencies in the OPT. However, funding has been inadequate and often is not earmarked to support a gender-transformative agenda.⁷¹ A few powerful States also often obstruct peace processes and undermine international laws which should be equally binding on all members.

Below, we look at four States involved in arms transfers to Israel through contracts, licences or deliveries:

USA, Germany, Italy and the UK.⁷²

Spain

is included as an example of a country that has taken specific measures in relation to Israeli arms transfers. Some other European countries and Canada are mentioned in relation to their provision of components of fighter jets.

The USA

Declared commitment to women's rights: The USA has signed but not ratified CEDAW. In its official statement before the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 69 in 2025, the USA stated that it 'strongly supports the protection of women and girls, the defense of their rights, and their empowerment' and that it 'remains dedicated to promoting the rights and empowerment of women and girls globally'.⁷³ The USA adopted the WPS Act of 2017, which aims to promote the meaningful participation of women in mediation and negotiation processes seeking to prevent, mitigate or resolve violent conflicts.⁷⁴ However, in April 2025, USA Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced the termination of WPS initiatives within the Department of Defense outside of what is required by statute, decrying WPS as 'a woke/social justice/Biden initiative that was pushed by feminists and left-wing activists'.⁷⁵ The USA is a permanent member of the Security Council and has routinely vetoed Security Council Resolutions on the OPT, including ceasefire resolutions on Gaza since October 2023, thereby obstructing their adoption.⁷⁶

Practice relating to arms transfer to Israel: In 2019–23, the USA accounted for 69% of Israel's arms imports.⁷⁷ It supplied all currently active combat aircraft in the Israeli air force, with special modifications for Israeli use. A USA law, since 2008, requires that the USA must ensure Israel's 'Qualitative Military Edge', including that USA arms supplies to other States in the Middle East should not compromise this.⁷⁸ The USA quickly stepped up emergency military aid to Israel after 7 October 2023, and in 2024 it expedited the process for the supply of additional F-35 and F-15 combat aircraft. On 9 May 2024, the US government announced that it would suspend a shipment of weapons to Israel, citing concerns over Israel's threatened attack on Rafah,⁷⁹ a suspension that lasted only until 11 July, notwithstanding the continuation of the Rafah operation. In 2025, the United States expedited numerous munitions shipments, in some instances circumventing the customary legislative review.

F-35 jets and Genocide in Gaza

On 17 February 2025, over 250 organizations in many parts of the world called on governments of the F-35 partner countries to immediately halt all arms transfers to Israel, including F-35 jets and parts and components for those jets – stressing that these jets were clearly involved in bombings in Gaza that resulted in atrocity crimes.⁸⁰ The F-35 partner countries are Austria, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the lead partner, the USA.⁸¹

Germany

Declared commitment to women's rights: Germany has declared that the advancement of the rights of women and girls in all their diversity is not only a moral imperative, but is key to achieving global stability, resilience and sustainable development.⁸² Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy stresses that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls and the eradication of all forms of gender-based discrimination should not remain an objective but become a reality. Specifically, Germany asserts that the WPS Agenda is a political priority, and that the protection and promotion of human rights and feminist foreign policy are key interests that it is pursuing worldwide.⁸³

Practice relating to arms transfers to Israel: Germany states that decisions on issuing arms export authorizations are taken on a case-by-case basis in light of the prevailing situation, based on the legal requirements laid down by the ATT; where there is sufficient suspicion that military equipment will be misused for internal repression or for other persistent and systematic violations of human rights, authorization will not be issued as a matter of principle.⁸⁴ Germany accounted for 30% of Israel's imports of major arms in 2019–23. Describing the government's position on arms exports to Israel since October 2023, the former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated in October 2024: 'Solidarity means that we enable Israel to defend its own country and keep it in a position to do so. That is why we have supplied weapons and military equipment in the past. That is why we are doing so now'.⁸⁵

But in fact, Germany's arms exports went far beyond serving Israel's legitimate defence needs. In March 2024, Nicaragua submitted a case to the ICJ asking the Court to order Germany to immediately cease military aid and arms exports to Israel.⁸⁶ The ICJ rejected the request for provisional measures but is yet to rule on the merits of the case. In its ruling rejecting the request for provisional measures, the ICJ stated that there has been a significant decrease in arms exports from Germany since November 2023, from approximately €200m in October 2023 to approximately €24m in November 2023, then to approximately €1m in March 2024. The Court also noted that since 7 October 2023, according to Germany, only four licences for 'war weapons' have been granted: two for training ammunition, one for propellant charges for test purposes, and one concerning the export of 3,000 portable anti-tank weapons. In September 2024, in response to reports that Germany had halted



Aerial drone image of North Gaza Governorate. An estimated 1.9 million Gaza residents have been displaced since the war began - 90% of the population. Gaza is littered with over 42 million tons of rubble. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

new arms exports to Israel due to legal challenges, a government spokesperson stated that there is, and will be, no moratorium on arms exports to Israel, explaining that the government grants arms exports on a case-by-case basis, considering the current situation and taking into account foreign and security policy considerations in accordance with legal and political requirements.⁸⁷

Italy

Declared commitment to women's rights: Italy's WPS National Action Plan (NAP) (2020–2024) states that it aims to strengthen women's role in peace processes and all decision-making processes; to ensure a gender perspective in peace operations; and to work towards women's empowerment, gender equality and the protection of women's and girls' human rights during conflict and post-conflict.⁸⁸ Italy revised its national control system of authorization on arms transfers in 2012, giving a centralized body under the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs control of the whole system of military weapons exports. The system requires that any individual or private company obtain a first authorisation at the time of the order and a second authorisation at the time of export or transfer of military items. Export authorization procedures were revised to increase controls and compliance with national and international law, including principles established by the ATT.⁸⁹

Practice relating to arms transfers to Israel: In 2019–23, Italy accounted for 0.9% of Israel's imports of major arms. Most of these comprised light helicopters (59%); the remainder were naval guns (41%). In January 2024, Italy declared that since October 2023 it had suspended all shipments of weapons systems or military material of any kind to Israel. However, in March 2024 Italy clarified that its arms exports to Israel had continued, but only for deliveries under contracts signed before 7 October, and only after checks to ensure that they would not be used against civilians in Gaza.⁹⁰ Some journalistic investigations also seem to question the government's conduct.⁹¹

The UK

Declared commitment to women's rights: The UK considers itself a global leader on gender equality, including championing WPS.⁹² It says it is committed not only to ensuring the protection of women and girls from violence, but also to achieving equality for women and girls across all sectors of society.⁹³ However, in February 2025 the UK announced cuts to its official development assistance budget. Civil society in the UK has expressed deep concern that these cuts will undermine the WPS Agenda and threaten gains in gender equality.⁹⁴ The UK is a permanent member of the Security Council and is the 'penholder' of the WPS Agenda.⁹⁵ On several occasions, it has vetoed Security Council Resolutions on the OPT, thus obstructing them from passing. However, in some recent cases it has abstained from voting, which has allowed the Resolutions to pass.⁹⁶ The UK WPS NAP states that the UK will work responsively, when appropriate, in conflict-affected countries beyond its listed focus countries (which do not include the OPT).⁹⁷

Practice relating to arms transfers to Israel: The UK government says that it takes its responsibilities seriously with regard to arms exports and rigorously assesses every application on a case-by-case basis. A risk assessment framework is used for assessing export licence applications and requires consideration of the impact of providing arms equipment. This applies to items whose export could have an adverse effect on peace in the UK or an ally State, or facilitate violations of human rights.⁹⁸ In 2023, the UK reportedly approved export licences worth around US\$22m for military exports to Israel, excluding open licences that allow the export of an unlimited quantity of specified goods. On 2 September 2024, the UK government took the decision to suspend 30 of its arms export licences to Israel, following a review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law. However, this excluded the provision of components of F35 fighter jets.⁹⁹ A case was brought before the High Court in London challenging the UK government's continued approval of arms export licences to Israel.¹⁰⁰ In June 2025, the case was rejected.¹⁰¹

An assessment of the UK WPS NAP by Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), a network of UK-based organizations, concludes that the UK’s continued approach in relation to Israel and the OPT ‘harms the objectives of UK funding for programming within the occupied Palestinian Territories, reversing progress made through UK-funded projects on economic empowerment, access to education, and psycho-social support’. It adds that the UK’s failure to implement its WPS NAP in the OPT, specifically in Gaza, ‘will further exacerbate the suffering of Palestinian women and girls’.¹⁰² GAPS concludes that there has been ‘a clear risk of UK-supplied equipment being used in ways that have prevented and destroyed women and girls’ access to health facilities and adequate nutrition’, indicating that ‘the UK does not always take the risks of GBV seriously in the export licensing risk assessment process’.¹⁰³

Spain

Declared commitment to women’s rights: Spain has a Feminist Foreign Policy¹⁰⁴ and has adopted an Action Plan For a Feminist Foreign Policy (2023–2024).¹⁰⁵ Spain’s WPS NAP (2017–2023) stresses that its goal is to ‘contribute to ensuring the protection of the human rights of women and girls, and their substantive participation in conflict prevention, as well as achieving and consolidating peace’.¹⁰⁶ Spain’s FFP highlights that the country is leading ‘the gender approach dimension of the Disarmament Agenda of the UN Secretary-General’.

Practice relating to arms transfers to Israel: Spain has repeatedly criticized Israel’s military attacks on Gaza. As early as 25 October 2023, Spain called on European countries to sever diplomatic relations with Israel and impose an arms embargo and economic sanctions.¹⁰⁷ On 12 February 2024, Spain issued a statement confirming that no arms sales to Israel had been authorized since 7 October 2023, and that it would not buy weapons from Israel. Subsequently, in April 2025, Spain’s government rescinded a deal worth US\$7.8m to buy bullets from an Israeli company for use by the Spanish Civil Guard police force.¹⁰⁸ Spain has also refused permission for ships carrying arms from other countries to Israel to dock at a Spanish port.¹⁰⁹ In May 2025, Spain’s Prime Minister described Israel as a ‘genocidal State’ and said that Spain does not do business with it.¹¹⁰

Most recently, in September 2025, Spain has issued a law decree on nine measures ‘to stop Gaza genocide’ and give support to the Palestinian population, including an arms embargo and a ban on imports of products produced in illegal settlements.¹¹¹

As long as States’ unhinged military support to Israel continues and Israel uses its military capabilities in the OPT, Israel’s illegal occupation will continue – as will violations of the rights of Palestinian women and girls by the occupation forces.

The UN Commission of Inquiry’s (October 2024) views on ‘Military related relations’¹¹²

The UN Commission of Inquiry (October 2024) emphasises that States have a duty to conduct a review of ‘all transfer and trade agreements with Israel, including but not limited to equipment, weapons, munitions, parts, components, dual use items and technology, to determine whether the goods or technology subject to the transfer or trade contribute to maintaining the unlawful occupation or are used to commit violations of international law. This includes both pre-existing agreements and future transfers to Israel’.¹¹³

The commission stresses that:

- States must immediately cease all transfer or trade to Israel which contribute to maintaining the unlawful occupation or are used to commit violations of international law, until such time that Israel can prove otherwise.¹¹⁴
- States must prevent and punish genocide. As such, the obligations of States engaged in any transfer or trade to Israel that contribute to Israel’s military capability to commit genocide are heightened in this regard.¹¹⁵
- Restriction on military related relations also applies to research and development cooperation with Israel, engaging in joint military training and exercises, and any imports from Israel that provide funding and economic support to Israel to maintain the unlawful occupation.¹¹⁶

4. PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT, SOCIETY AND THE WPS AGENDA

Despite the UNSC’s inconsistent approach to Palestinian women and the WPS Agenda, the State of Palestine has engaged actively with the Agenda; the Ministry of Women’s Affairs of the State of Palestine has adopted two NAPs.¹¹⁷ The second NAP emphasizes the essential role of Palestinian women in ‘uniting all the Palestinian people around a common identity and national vision against Israel’s occupation and its policies’.¹¹⁸

The Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for the WPS Agenda has also adopted a strategic framework and plan of action.¹¹⁹ Like the two WPS NAPs and Palestinian engagement with the Security Council WPS Agenda, this emphasizes the role of the international community in **protecting** Palestinian women from violations under Israel’s illegal occupation and **preventing** escalation of the situation, including through ensuring accountability measures. It highlights the importance of the **participation** of Palestinian women in peace negotiations and internal Palestinian political reconciliation efforts. It also recognizes the need to mainstream gender in humanitarian planning and response, and **in relief and recovery** efforts, particularly addressing the needs of women and girls who suffer directly from the gendered impact of occupation.¹²⁰ The second NAP also expands the focus beyond direct violations under the Israeli occupation to include sexual and gender-based violence as a recognized feature of war.¹²¹



Palestinian schoolboys and girls walk past Israeli military vehicles during an army raid in the Jenin refugee camp near the West Bank city of Jenin. Photo by: REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman

Despite the unlawful occupation posing significant barriers to realizing women’s rights and to the PA’s ability to fulfil some of its obligations, the Palestinian government continues to have a legal obligation to promote and protect women’s rights. Since acceding to CEDAW in 2014, Palestine has made some gender-sensitive legal reforms, including improved support for survivors of violence. However, Palestine still lacks comprehensive legislation addressing all forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, violence in the community, and sexual violence or harassment. This is partially due to the fragmented

legal framework in the OPT.¹²² Violence against women, including violence against women’s rights defenders, remains widespread throughout the OPT and often goes unpunished by PA institutions and public officials. At the same time, the PA arbitrarily detains its opponents and critics, including students and journalists.

The Independent Commission for Human Rights¹²³ documents numerous complaints against the PA of arbitrary arrest, including

detention without charge or trial, and torture and ill treatment during detention.¹²⁴ This reflects a wider pattern of institutional neglect and a lack of accountability, particularly regarding violence and gender-based violence, including that which is perpetrated by security personnel. This gap in accountability contributes to a culture of silence and impunity. Violence against women permeates all levels of society, with three out of five married women and two out of five single women experiencing violence, predominantly domestic in nature. Yet more than half of these survivors remain silent, deterred by fear, stigma and a deep mistrust in protective systems.¹²⁵

Incidents of intimate partner violence also appear to have increased, particularly after 7 October 2023, especially due to precarious financial circumstances, extreme psychological stress as a result of the political instability and restrictions imposed by Israeli forces. This, combined with harmful and negative gender norms within Palestinian society contribute to a breakdown of the social fabric that continues to affect women and girls disproportionately.¹²⁶

The ‘double jeopardy’ facing Palestinian women

Palestinian women face combined systems of discrimination, with violations by the Israeli occupation entrenching and exacerbating the detrimental impacts of patriarchal culture and discriminatory laws, practices and norms in the OPT; a situation that has been described as ‘double jeopardy’.¹²⁷

Antiquated laws that embody gender-based discrimination – which existed before 1967 in both the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – continue to apply with only minor amendments. Such laws reinforce patriarchal, discriminatory and protectionist attitudes that disregard or turn a blind eye to gender-based violence. These same attitudes and harmful social norms severely restrict women’s movements and their ability to make choices about their lives – including decisions related to marriage, access to sexual and reproductive health and protection services, as well as economic and political participation. They also mean women and girls bear a disproportionate care workload, including looking after children and older people, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other household activities.¹²⁸

CSOs lead vital programs including supporting victims/survivors of gender-based violence, lobbying for reforms, raising awareness and promoting positive gender relations and norms. However, their efforts are severely hampered by restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation. As a result of ‘double jeopardy’, roles and opportunities for Palestinian women and girls remain limited.

Women’s political participation a core objective of the NAPs, has also seen only modest improvements despite sustained advocacy by CSOs through policy reform, research and awareness-raising campaigns.

Entrenched masculinist discourse and political resistance continue to limit women’s access to leadership and decision-making roles.¹²⁹ While no presidential or legislative elections have been held since 2006, data from the 2021-2022 local elections in the West Bank indicate that women comprised only 21% of elected or appointed officials, with 23% representation in the Central Council and 19% in the Palestinian National Council.¹³⁰ As of March 2024, the State of Palestine Cabinet’s 23 ministers included only four women, heading the Ministries of Women’s Affairs, Labour, Social Development, and State for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. Of the 15 governors, only one is a woman. In the judiciary, women constitute about 19% of judges and 18% of prosecutors, highlighting their marginal presence in executive and judicial branches.¹³¹

Funding mechanisms tied to the WPS framework continue to mirror the traditional aid paradigm, where the geopolitical interests of donors heavily influence priorities, sometimes further militarizing recipient entities.¹³² In Palestine, this is evident through continued subsidies to Israel’s security apparatus from Global North countries¹³³ alongside bilateral aid to the Palestinian National Authority, with approximately one-third directed to the security sector. The Palestinian security sector alone accounts for 28% of public expenditure.¹³⁴

This skewed prioritization has deepened the marginalization of other sectors related to social affairs, including gender initiatives. For instance, the first NAP relied predominantly on donor funds rather than national budget allocations,¹³⁵ raising concerns about the sustainability of efforts. CSOs have repeatedly urged the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to mainstream NAP funding into the national budget and ensure that resources reach relevant ministries.¹³⁶ However, internal fragmentation and budgetary disarray within these ministries continue to obstruct meaningful progress, and financing continues to be inadequate and inconsistent.

De facto authority in Gaza and WPS

Internal Palestinian division resulted in the control of the Gaza Strip by Hamas since 2007 and the control of the West Bank by the PA.¹³⁷ After its win of the majority of seats in the Legislative Council elections in 2006, and takeover of the Gaza Strip, Hamas has been the responsible entity administering public institutions and the provision of public services in Gaza, as a *de facto* authority. No elections have been held in Gaza since then. Today, the political and territorial split between the PA and Hamas has become deeply entrenched, with only the PA enjoying international recognition and support, while the Legislative Council has been inactive for years.¹³⁸ In the absence of the legislative institution, laws in the West Bank have been issued through presidential decrees by the president of the PA, while in Gaza, they are issued by the Reform and Change Bloc, which was part of the elected Legislative Council in 2006. The Hamas-led government in Gaza refuses to implement the laws issued in the West Bank.¹³⁹

*As one interviewee from the OPT said: ‘Internal political divisions and the absence of the rule of law within both governing authorities have resulted in the WPS NAPs, developed by the Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs, not being recognized by the Hamas-led government in Gaza. As a result, the NAPs are effectively inapplicable to nearly half of the women in Palestine, leaving their implementation solely to civil society organizations, without any governmental support’.*¹⁴⁰

This political division in the OPT often results in the marginalization of women from the Gaza Strip in WPS and NAP-related efforts, as the ongoing political fragmentation continues to hinder the meaningful implementation of the NAPs in Gaza.¹⁴¹ In addition to Israeli violations directed against women and girls specifically, all violations of Palestinians result in additional, disproportionate harms.



Ameerah cooks Maftoul for displaced families in Rafah based on a contract she signed with Al Biader Society. She borrows pots from friends and neighbours so that she can resume her work in food processing. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

5. ISRAELI VIOLATIONS IN THE OPT AND THEIR GENDERED IMPACTS

This section documents violations of human rights in the OPT, particularly during the unprecedented levels of violence and humanitarian suffering caused by Israel's atrocities and crimes against humanity against Palestinians since October 2023. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account, but rather an overview illustrated with examples and testimonies. These focus on the particular and disproportionate gendered impacts of the occupation and conflict on women and girls.

It is important to note that women in the OPT are not a homogenous group; their experiences are shaped through intersecting identities based on gender, race, class and other characteristics. While this report focuses on women and the WPS Agenda, it recognizes that Israel's illegal occupation and its discriminatory policies and practices have a gendered impact on men and boys, and result in harmful gendered expectations and various forms of toxic masculinities (which in turn impact women and girls; see section 3 above). Men and boys also experience gender-based and sexual violence perpetrated by Israeli soldiers.¹⁴²

Settlement expansion and State complicity in settler violence

Settlement expansion is integral to the policies and practices of Israel's illegal occupation. Israeli settlers surround Palestinian communities in all parts of the West Bank including East Jerusalem, depriving them of land and resources, and committing abuses against them, including sexual and gender-based abuses. Israel's confiscation of land, settlement expansion and the construction of the illegal separation wall are carried out in violation of international law.¹⁴³

The transfer by an occupying power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies is prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention and is considered a war crime according to the Rome Statute of the ICC.¹⁴⁴



The destruction by Israeli forces of Palestinian tents and animal shelters in the herder community of Wadi al-Ahmar, central Jordan Valley. Photo by: Keren Manor / Activestills

Under international law, states must not recognize as lawful Israeli settlements in the OPT and must refrain from supporting activities that enable their expansion, including the provision of arms that may empower settlers, or may be issued to them by the Israeli government, or be used by them to commit violence against Palestinians.

1 Nov 2023 → 31 Oct 2024

– 24,193 –

dunams of land in the West Bank were declared as "State land" by Israel

OHCHR reports there was an already significant expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and outposts between November 2022 and October 2023,¹⁴⁵ which has been followed by another sharp increase in the rate of expansion after October 2023. From 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, some 24,193 dunams of land in the West Bank were declared as



Palestinian women preparing their greenhouse in Bardalah, northern Jordan Valley to plant a new season of cucumbers. Photo by: Lorenzo Tugnoly

'State land' by Israel, with the Jordan Valley particularly targeted. This was the largest seizure of land in over 30 years, according to OHCHR.¹⁴⁶ As a result, an additional 2,400 Palestinians, nearly half of them children, were forcibly displaced by Israeli settlers.¹⁴⁷

Settler violence and Israel's complicity

Violence by settlers is pervasive and has surged since October 2023. In its July 2024 Advisory Opinion, the ICJ found that settler violence against Palestinians, impunity for settlers, and the excessive use of State force against Palestinians contribute to 'a coercive environment', and that Israel's systematic failure to prevent or punish such violence contravenes its obligations under international law.¹⁴⁸ The UN Security Council has repeatedly underlined that the Israeli policy and practice of establishing settlements in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a 'flagrant violation' of international law and a major obstacle to peace.¹⁴⁹

In 2024, the UN reported the highest ever number of incidents of settler violence leading to casualties, damage to property, or both. In the first half of 2025 alone, Israeli settlers injured over 220 Palestinians, the highest rate of settler violence in at least 20 years.¹⁵⁰

Settler violence against Palestinians is also enabled by the arming of settlers by the Israeli government. Israeli 'settlements defence squads' – civilian teams originally entrusted with the protection of settlements and mandated to operate only within settlement boundaries – have been drafted into Israeli regional army battalion units. In addition, 'regional defence battalions' comprising reservists in Israeli forces, many of whom are settlers, were deployed in the West Bank after 7 October. Israeli settlers often commit violence with the protection, complicity, acquiescence or even direct participation of Israeli military forces, reinforcing a pattern of systemic impunity and State-sanctioned violence.¹⁵¹ OHCHR observes how the line between settler violence and State violence 'has further blurred, including violence with the declared intent to forcibly transfer Palestinians from their land'.¹⁵²

Settler violence takes many forms, including shooting and other physical attacks on Palestinian women, men, children and elderly people; vandalizing agricultural land and uprooting crops and trees; damaging vehicles and property; attacking herders and killing or stealing their livestock; and subjecting people to insults, threats and other degrading and dehumanizing treatment. Settlers also prevent Palestinians from accessing surrounding fields and neighbouring communities. As well as suffering physical and psychological damage, survivors of settler attacks often incur costs for healthcare and legal services, and for repairing or replacing damaged property.¹⁵³

Women and girls who are victims of violence or have witnessed it are often left traumatized, fearing that it may be repeated. Settler violence also causes trauma among other members of the family, especially children. This creates an additional, complex care responsibility for women, often making them feel inadequate, frustrated and constantly retraumatized.

In its March 2025 report, the Independent COI found clear evidence that Israeli settlers (and Israeli forces) commit sexual and gender-based crimes, humiliating, punishing and intimidating Palestinians, also destroying and expelling their communities. This includes sexualized violence and physical, psychological and verbal abuse. This includes sexualized violence and physical, psychological and verbal abuse. As a result, **Palestinian women and girls in particular live in constant fear, with many afraid to leave their homes.**¹⁵⁴

Palestinians' lack of trust in Israeli law enforcement, alongside fear of reprisals, contributes to a low rate of complaints against Israeli settlers. Complaints that are filed are unlikely to result in a conviction.¹⁵⁵

Example: Settler violence in al-Moghayyer¹⁵⁶

Al-Moghayyer village near Ramallah faces regular attacks by illegal Israeli settlers. The community depends on herding goats and sheep, producing dairy products, and cultivating and harvesting olive groves. During the olive harvest season in 2024, settlers attacked and injured several villagers, stole olives, burnt down houses and shot at water containers. In August 2025, Israeli forces prevented movement to and from the village. A few individuals managed to leave on humanitarian grounds; they included a woman in labour, who had tear gas fired at her as she walked to reach an ambulance. Thankfully she escaped injury.

On 21 August 2025, hundreds of Israeli soldiers raided the village, ransacked homes and physically assaulted residents. Again, they fired tear gas, with five women and six children suffering injury from tear gas inhalation. The soldiers detained 14 Palestinians, including a woman, a child, and the head of the village council. The following day, Israeli forces issued a military order to seize land owned by Palestinians. Settlers then bulldozed and uprooted thousands of olive trees in the area, a couple of months before the harvest was ready to be picked, and stabbed and killed villagers' livestock.¹⁵⁷

Settlers issue verbal threats to Palestinians that they will be killed if they don't leave the area. Many families flee with their livestock, leaving behind their homes, land and farming infrastructure.¹⁵⁸ With limited means to continue their livelihood, forcibly displaced families have a much-reduced income. **This leaves women struggling to manage the household with reduced resources.** Settlers routinely attack and contaminate water infrastructure and equipment. **Women and girls are the main users of water for domestic purposes, including food preparation, cleaning and laundry, and therefore suffer most from the impacts of water shortage or contamination.**

Palestinians in Hebron city and the surrounding area are often subject to extreme settler violence, which escalated after October 2023. Women and girls face attacks and gender-based abuse by settlers, including sexual harassment, threats of rape and use of obscene language.¹⁵⁹ Physical violence is common; there have been several reports of Palestinian women and girls being pushed to the ground and kicked and punched repeatedly, often leaving them in need of medical treatment. Settlers shoot at and damage property and throw rubbish at Palestinian homes and schools.¹⁶⁰ **As a result, women and girls fear leaving home to seek healthcare or access markets, and many girls drop out of school.**

Testimony: Dalal suffers a miscarriage due to settler attack¹⁶¹

Dalal, a 31-year-old schoolteacher and mother of two, lives in a flat in a three-storey building overlooking the main street of Kiryat Arba settlement near Hebron. On 14 September 2024, when Dalal was two months pregnant, she woke at around 1:30am to the sound of gunfire and looked out to see dozens of settlers, some armed, along with members of Israel's military forces. Her husband and some other men decided to leave, fearing they would be targeted.

The settlers began to shoot and throw stones at the building, smashing windows. Dalal was terrified

that they would break into her home and kill her and her two children. She became very anxious, crying uncontrollably. She then started to vomit and bleed. A relative called an ambulance, and a paramedic administered first aid and advised her to go to the hospital. Dalal refused because she did not want to leave her children. When the soldiers and settlers finally left, her husband came home and took her to the clinic, where she was told she had had a miscarriage.

'I am still grieving over the loss of my baby,' says Dalal. 'My children cannot stop talking about the settler attack and they are constantly anxious. They cannot sleep and I always have to go to their room at night, so they feel safe.' Sadly, Dalal's experience is one among many similar cases.¹⁶²



Marwa, from Gaza is doing the laundry and home chorus in her shelter in a school in Gaza. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

Settler violence in al-Mu'arrajat villages¹⁶³

In al-Mu'arrajat, near Jericho, three villages are home to Bedouin refugees who were forced to flee their original homes in the Naqab (Negev) in 1948.¹⁶⁴ The villages are formed of tents, as is the Bedouin custom, and herding is the main source of income. Since October 2023, settlers from a nearby outpost have escalated their attacks and intimidation of the community, with the protection, facilitation and participation of Israeli soldiers. Settlers shoot at herders, steal and kill livestock, and threaten villagers. On one occasion, they put dolls, daubed with red paint to resemble blood, in the garden of a school and dug mock graves, sparking intense fear among villagers. Settlers hoisted Israeli flags around the villages and set the mosque on fire. They repeatedly attacked men, women and children, including teachers and students on their way to class.

Villagers had to keep their animals within their living area for safety and were forced to buy food for them, as grazing became too dangerous. Recently, settlers have increasingly carried out attacks dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by Israeli soldiers. In September 2024, settlers accompanied by Israeli forces broke into the school during classes and assaulted and injured two female teachers with sticks.

On 2–3 July 2025, settlers attacked Palestinian families. This resulted in the displacement of the entire community of about 170 people. During the July 2025 settler attack, settlers raided the school, ransacked property, and sprayed anti-Palestinian graffiti, including defacing a Palestinian flag mural with an Israeli star. The school, which now stands empty, previously served 74 students, including 37 girls, supported by 15 teachers.



Israeli army machines demolish a Palestinian house during an Israeli raid in the West Bank city of Jenin. Photo by: REUTERS/ Mohamad Torokman

Destruction of property and forced displacement



Since October 2023, Israeli military attacks on the Gaza Strip have resulted in the widespread destruction of civilian homes, infrastructure, agricultural land and other property. According to the Global Shelter Cluster, around 86.3% of the Gaza Strip fell within Israeli-designated militarized zones as of August 2025, areas under displacement orders, or both.¹⁶⁵ A staggering 95% of housing has been destroyed or damaged.¹⁶⁶ Hundreds of thousands of families have been displaced and are trying to survive in overcrowded and unsafe conditions; the situation worsened with the intensified bombardment of Gaza City from mid-August 2025. The shelter situation is catastrophic and is likely to deteriorate further due to ongoing forced displacement.¹⁶⁷

Forcibly displaced Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are living in overcrowded shelters or makeshift tents made from plastic sheeting, tarpaulins and salvaged materials. Living conditions further deteriorate in bad weather, with tents becoming flooded and damaged. The Global Shelter Cluster indicates that 1.4 million people need basic emergency shelter. A five-month restriction imposed by Israel before mid-August 2025 on shelter deliveries to Gaza by international NGOs and UNRWA has led to a massive shortage of tents, tarpaulins and basic household items.¹⁶⁸ This **increases the vulnerability of displaced women and girls who are forced to live in overcrowded tents or other inadequate shelters, deprived of many basic necessities.**



Wesam is standing in the middle of her tent. At the beginning of 2024, Wesam and her husband Youssef prayed for a year ahead full of goodness. Now Wesam struggles to find answers about Youssef's fate, since he went missing last March. Wesam faces the immense challenges of war, trying to care for her children, and cope with the dilemma of disappearance, one faced by thousands of Palestinians in Gaza. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

At the end of May 2025, Oxfam warned that since the end of the previous ceasefire (19 January to 18 March 2025), 'Israel [has] issued nearly one displacement order every two days, strangling people into isolated areas covering less than 20 percent of the Gaza Strip'.¹⁶⁹ Despite the Israeli military designating certain areas as 'safe zones' and ordering families to move there, these areas have been repeatedly struck by airstrikes and shelling. No area in Gaza can be considered safe. What Israel calls 'evacuation orders' are continuing;

these are effectively forced displacement orders that, according to OHCHR, have resulted in the 'forcible transfer of Palestinians in Gaza into ever shrinking spaces where they have little or no access to life-saving services, including water, food and shelter, and where they continue to be subject to attacks'.¹⁷⁰ Such attacks on civilians are in violation of obligations under IHL to protect civilians, and have turned these areas into what the OHCHR has described as 'killing fields'.¹⁷¹

In the West Bank, while settler populations and infrastructure are expanding, Israeli authorities continue to demolish Palestinian properties and forcibly displace families in Area C, often on the pretext of lack of building permits, which are virtually impossible to obtain. The authorities then often force the property owners to pay a fine. When some people learn that their home is to be demolished, they destroy it themselves to avoid being fined on top of losing their home. This policy is especially affecting herding and Bedouin communities.¹⁷²

The Israeli military has shot at people, and burned and destroyed houses and infrastructure at a large scale, including hospitals.¹⁷³ Demolitions and displacement continue and, by May 2025, more than 30,000 Palestinians still displaced in the northern West Bank, more than one third are children.¹⁷⁴ Attacks on water and sewage networks have deprived tens of thousands of people of adequate access to water and sanitation services.¹⁷⁵

Oxfam warns that the dramatic rise in Israeli military and settler violence 'has caused the largest forced displacement of people in the West Bank since the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory began in 1967, amid fears of no right of return. At the same time, vital humanitarian work and projects are being delayed or destroyed and facing imminent threats'.¹⁷⁶

The Israeli military raids in 2025 have once again forcibly displaced residents of refugee camps – individuals who were first rendered refugees by the Nakba in 1948 and have been denied their right to return ever since.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by house demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Demolitions are usually carried out at night, causing trauma for everyone present but especially women and girls, who may be forced to leave in their nightwear with no appropriate cover and clothing, causing them fear and humiliation. Children are traumatized by the loss of their home, placing an additional burden on women as the main carers. During raids and demolitions, Israeli soldiers often subject Palestinian women to acts that may constitute sexual violence or degrading treatment under international law, including forcing them to undress in front of family members. While some cases are reported, many are not due to fear of societal stigma.¹⁷⁷

Displacement, amounting to forcible transfer in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, also has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Due to traditional social structures that regard care and household work as women's responsibility, women have to manage their family's practical needs in an unfamiliar and challenging environment, with greatly reduced resources and severely limited personal freedom or control.¹⁷⁸

Loss of property compounds women's vulnerability. Patriarchal laws, traditions and customs mean women do not own or control property and are commonly prevented from claiming their right of inheritance,¹⁷⁹ making them dependent on property registered in the name of and controlled by a male relative. It is therefore common for displaced women and their families to move in with the husband's relatives. **Women indicate that displacement strips of them of any independence and authority they previously enjoyed, however little.**¹⁸⁰ They also lose their access to healthcare and other services, support networks, and their ability to engage in decision making. Displaced women often have to cope with an even higher demand for unpaid care work and may become more vulnerable to gender-based violence, especially when having to share a home and very limited resources with others. Privacy is limited, creating challenges in pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, as well as for women and girls managing menstruation.

Women and girls are facing many health challenges due to displacement. For example, in December 2024, the UN conducted an inter-agency assessment aimed at identifying and addressing needs at four displacement sites in Gaza city, which found that there was a dire lack of latrines and hygiene supplies, growing sewage and solid waste accumulation, and open defecation.¹⁸¹ People were forced to walk several hundred metres to another heavily congested site to use a latrine. **Due to insecurity and lack of lighting, women and girls were forced to use containers inside their tents at night instead of visiting latrines.**¹⁸² The assessment also found that there was no access to nearby medical points or basic medications. This particularly affected the health of babies, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people in need of emergency services.

Attacks on life and health

‘The nightmare in Gaza is more than a humanitarian crisis. It is a crisis of humanity’.¹⁸³

The Israeli military’s indiscriminate attacks on civilians in Gaza has resulted in the deaths and injury of tens of thousands of people. A ceasefire on 19 January 2025 brought some respite but ended abruptly on 18 March 2025, with over 400 Palestinians killed in one night of bombing.¹⁸⁴

WCNSF (wounded child, no surviving family): This acronym, written in marker pen on the arms of orphaned girls and boys by the medics who treat them, reflects the devastating impacts of the genocide on children. Days often pass until someone is able to identify an orphaned child and make arrangements for their care.¹⁸⁵

Israel’s methods of warfare, including the targeting of residential buildings and the indiscriminate use of heavy explosives in densely populated areas, has resulted in a very high proportion of women and children being among those killed.¹⁸⁶ OHCHR has stated that ‘attacks on shelters leading to verifiably high civilian fatalities, especially in an area that the Israeli military has unilaterally declared safe, suggests a complete disregard for the lives of Palestinian civilians and raises grave concerns about the systematic commission of disproportionate attacks or attacks directed at civilians, which are war crimes’.¹⁸⁷ The basics of human survival, which were already scarce, have been destroyed.

Testimony: [My last message to the world, by Ayat Khadoura](#)

(Please click on the link above to see her face, hear her voice, know her name. She is not a number.)

Ayat Khadoura, a freelance journalist and podcast presenter, was killed alongside members of her family in an Israeli airstrike on 20 November 2023. In a recording for Al Jazeera entitled ‘My Last Message to the World’, Ayat said: ‘We are human beings like everyone else in the world. We had many big dreams. But unfortunately, today our dreams are that if we were martyred, we would be martyred as one body, that people would recognize us, and not be dismembered and put in a bag. Our dreams have become that we would not hear the sound of bombing. We never imagined that we would reach this stage and live such a life without the most basic necessities of life. There are things

we cannot talk about. Sometimes this war will end, and [those] who will live will tell people what happened to us, what we lived through.’

Since 7 October 2023, more than 248 journalists in the OPT have been killed by Israeli forces, in what is considered the ‘deadliest conflict ever for journalists’.¹⁸⁸



Killing of health workers and destruction of healthcare facilities

Under Customary IHL, medical personnel, facilities and transport must be respected and protected and punishing a person for performing medical duties is prohibited. In cases of displacement, all possible measures must be taken to ensure that displaced civilians are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition. The health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected.¹⁸⁹ Violations of these rules may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to the Rome Statute of the ICC, or genocidal acts under the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention. The deliberate destruction of healthcare facilities is also prohibited and may amount to collective punishment, which would also constitute a war crime.

Before October 2023, Gaza’s healthcare system was already overstretched and underfunded, weakened by long-standing movement restrictions that intensified after 2000 and culminated in a comprehensive land, air, and sea blockade in 2007.¹⁹⁰

As a result, health facilities often ran out of essential medications, including for oncology, radiotherapy and

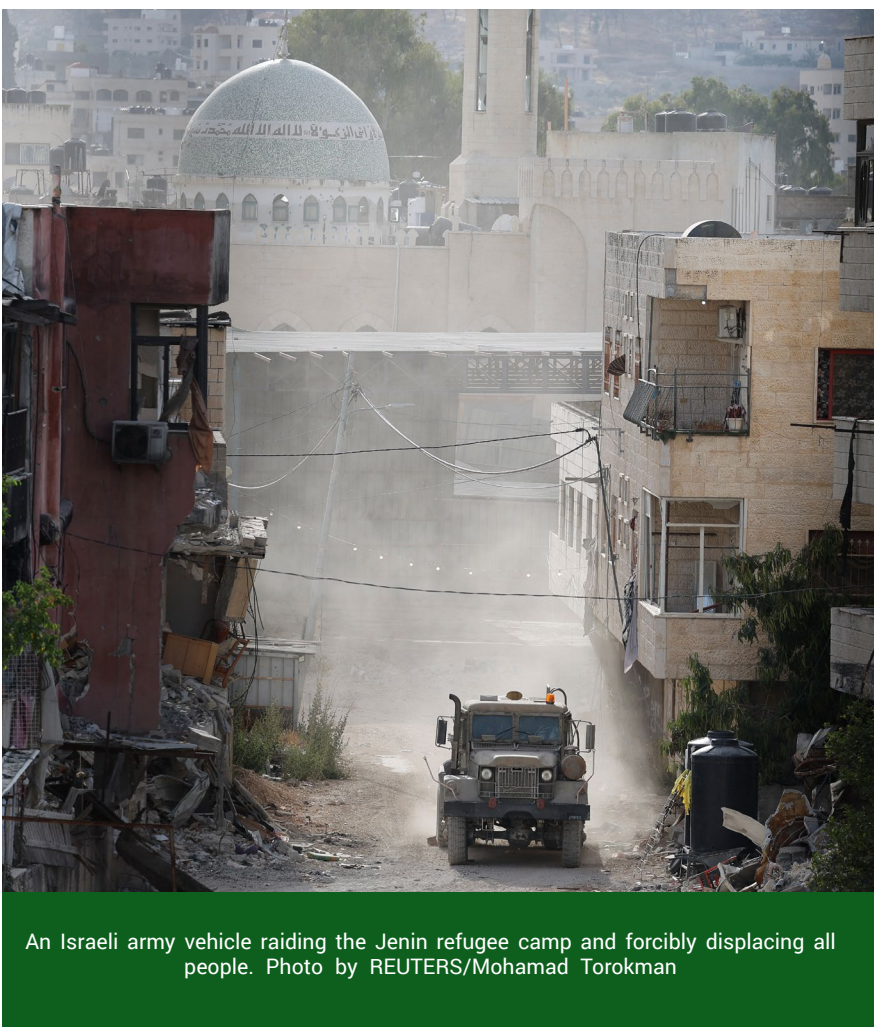
chemotherapy, and for early diagnosis of cancer and other diseases.

Following Israel’s destructive military campaign since October 2023, Gaza was placed under a total siege and no travel permits were issued, meaning patients lost access to critical medical checkups and specialist treatment in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. OHCHR highlights how since then, the already damaged health system ‘has been targeted, resulting in the killing of hundreds of health and medical professionals’.¹⁹¹ On several occasions, Israeli forces have bombed ambulance crew members or shot directly at medical personnel, causing severe injuries and death.¹⁹² At least 500 aid workers were killed in Gaza between October 2023 and August 2025.¹⁹³ As well as each death being a personal tragedy, the killing of health workers further undermines the health system.¹⁹⁴ Airstrikes and a lack of medical supplies, food, water and fuel have caused a near total collapse of the health system. Hospitals that are able to operate are doing so at levels far beyond capacity due to rising numbers of staff and patients injured by the conflict or suffering illness due to malnutrition and poor sanitation.

The UN Commission of Inquiry found that ‘Israeli authorities deliberately destroyed (...) healthcare facilities rendering them non-functional, while simultaneously imposing a siege, and preventing humanitarian assistance at scale, including necessary medications and equipment to ensure safe pregnancies, deliveries and neonatal care’.¹⁹⁵

Healthcare for women devastated

The impact of the conflict on healthcare has had an extremely detrimental effect on women, especially those in need of pre- and postnatal care. Malnutrition poses serious risks to the health and survival of both mothers and their unborn and newborn babies.¹⁹⁶ The lack of ambulance services or affordable transport, and restricted access to hospitals have made it virtually impossible for many women to receive adequate and timely healthcare.¹⁹⁷ **Some women may be too fragile to travel, unable to pay transport costs,**



or reluctant to seek healthcare advice and treatment in unfamiliar settings.

Israel has also escalated its attacks on healthcare in the West Bank. Hospitals and clinics are often surrounded and raided, and healthcare workers are subjected to physical violence while trying to save lives. Destruction of medical sites in refugee camps, as well as the harassment, detention, injury and killing of first responders and medical workers have increased: the World Health Organization documented 909 attacks on healthcare in the West Bank between 7 October 2023 and 9 September 2025.¹⁹⁸ Ambulances are routinely blocked by Israeli forces at checkpoints while carrying critical patients. Palestinians requiring treatment face severe restrictions on access to East Jerusalem, where many of the specialized hospitals are.¹⁹⁹ as of February 2025,²⁰⁰ It is estimated that at least 800 Israeli

military checkpoints, barriers and gates are in place at the entrances of villages and cities across the West Bank.

Women and girls frequently report that searches at these checkpoints are intrusive and seem intended to harass and humiliate them.²⁰¹ As a result, women and girls often limit their movements, even when they need health treatment.

Testimony: Fatima, Tal Rumaida, Hebron

Fatima lives in Tal Rumaida, which is in the middle of Hebron city and surrounded by checkpoints. She suffers from a heart condition, and has an electric device inserted under her skin, which beeps when she goes through the electronic inspection machines at checkpoints. On one occasion, an Israeli male soldier insisted on conducting a body search on Fatima, touching private parts of her body, even though he had reviewed the medical report she provided. Fatima says this made her feel humiliated, stressed and degraded.²⁰²

Giving birth in the Gaza Strip is now unbearable and unsafe. Many women have no choice but to give birth in makeshift tents within overcrowded camps of internally displaced persons, temporary shelters or makeshift medical facilities that lack essential medical equipment, sanitary conditions, hygiene products and privacy; they also lack electricity or fuel for generators. This has resulted in women giving birth in incredibly distressing and unsanitary conditions, posing risks of infection, birth complications and postpartum trauma. Many pregnant women have undergone C-sections without anesthesia, an extremely painful and traumatic experience.²⁰³ There has also been a sharp increase in the number of premature and complicated births.²⁰⁴ Studies show a significant relationship between exposure to armed violence and stillbirth or miscarriage,²⁰⁵ and that explosive weapon blast waves can cause damage which leads to miscarriage.²⁰⁶

Testimony: The case of Tahani Abdel Rahman²⁰⁷

In late November 2023, Tahani started to experience intense abdominal pain and was diagnosed with ‘molar pregnancy’.²⁰⁸ Following surgery, doctors advised her to do a specific medical test but she was unable to access this. Her condition worsened, and Tahani suffered severe bleeding. She was told that she needed another emergency surgery. After fainting multiple times, Tahani underwent another procedure without anesthesia. Doctors advised chemotherapy. Tahani continues to suffer from dizziness, anaemia and weakness, worsened by food shortages, and urgently needs an MRI scan, but there are no functioning machines she can access.²⁰⁹



Suhad is a mother to six children, in the most adverse circumstances. She fell pregnant with her sixth child during Israel’s war on Gaza and has been forced to navigate the challenges of pregnancy on top of battling to provide food and water for her existing family during bombardments, displacement and aid sieges. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

In reference to the restriction of humanitarian aid and the deprivation of essential care, food, water, medicine and shelter that are vital to the survival of pregnant, postpartum and lactating women and their newborns and children in Gaza, the COI concluded that ‘the Israeli authorities have destroyed in part the reproductive capacity of the Palestinians in Gaza as a group, including by imposing measures intended to prevent births, one of the categories of genocidal acts in the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention’.²¹⁰

Women and girls’ mental health is considered to be at breaking point due to extreme and sustained levels of fear, trauma and exhaustion.²¹¹ UN Women data shows that 75% of women in Gaza suffer regular depression, 62% cannot sleep, and 65% suffer from nightmares and anxiety. With limited access to care, most suffer without any treatment.²¹²

Basic hygiene supplies have become out of reach for most people and there is an urgent need for dignity kits, including period products.²¹³ It is estimated that, of Gaza’s population of 2.1 million people, approximately 690,000 women and girls are of menstruating age.²¹⁴ Diapers and infant formula are also desperately needed. People with disabilities, many of whom became disabled due to injuries sustained in the conflict, report severe mobility challenges due to the destruction and the lack of infrastructure and assistive devices.²¹⁵

Testimony: The ordeal of Salma, a doctor²¹⁶

Salma is a hospital doctor in Gaza, who has received several awards in recognition of her work. In 2008, Salma became her family’s sole breadwinner after her husband was killed in an Israeli attack. In 2014, she sustained a serious injury to her right arm and hand during an attack on the hospital where she worked. She underwent emergency surgery, which was followed by several other surgeries and treatment to save her hand and arm. Although she never regained full movement, Salma learnt to use her left hand and was able to resume her work and daily life.

After October 2023, Salma and her children were displaced. They now have to walk a long distance to queue to use a makeshift toilet, with little privacy. Salma says that menstruation is particularly challenging in these circumstances, particularly for her 16-year-old daughter. As they do not have adequate sanitary towels, they have to use old cloths. Washing is also an ordeal. Salma’s daughter became extremely anxious

about this and started refusing to leave the tent. Salma feels that she is unable to support her daughter and meet her needs, which she finds traumatizing.

Starvation as a weapon of warfare

The UN Commission of Inquiry found that, as early as December 2023, Israel’s military offensive and siege on Gaza was used to commit the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare.²¹⁷



Duaa Abu Sabha cooks in her tent in the Al-Mawasi area in Khan Yunis Governorate while her husband plays with their children. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

The Israeli authorities’ withholding of aid has had a devastating impact on vulnerable people, including pregnant women and newborns. In late May 2025, Israeli officials shut down the aid distribution system run by the UN (following the imposition of a full siege in March 2025) and its humanitarian partners, and replaced it with a system of Israeli hubs under conditions set by the Israeli military. The UN and its partners declared that they will not participate in this or any scheme that does not adhere to the global humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.²¹⁸ The 400 aid distribution points that were operating during the temporary ceasefire across Gaza were replaced by just four military-controlled distribution sites, forcing two million people into overcrowded, militarized zones where every day they faced gunfire while trying to access food. Palestinian women and men, mothers and fathers in Gaza faced an impossible choice: starve, or risk being shot while trying to get food for their families.²¹⁹ OCHA reports that at least 2,000 people seeking aid were killed in three months.²²⁰

On 29 July 2025, the IPC warned of mounting evidence that widespread starvation, malnutrition and

disease were driving a rise in hunger-related deaths, and that children under the age of five and pregnant or breastfeeding women were facing acute malnutrition across the Gaza Strip.²²¹ The IPC released an assessment on 22 August 2025, concluding that as of 15 August 2025, **famine was confirmed in Gaza Governorate**. The IPC stated that ‘after 22 months of relentless conflict, over half a million people in the Gaza Strip are facing catastrophic conditions characterised by starvation, destitution and death’.²²² The IPC indicated that 54% of people in Gaza were in emergency, and 20% in crisis, and predicted that between mid-August and the end of September 2025, famine would spread to other governorates.²²³

While the entire population is affected, **hunger and malnutrition have particularly serious consequences for women, especially pregnant and breastfeeding women and their babies**. Even when food is available, no matter how little, women put feeding their children and other vulnerable family members before themselves, therefore eating last and least.²²⁴

Women and girls in detention

There has been a significant spike in Israel’s use of administrative detention since October 2023, which had already reached a 20-year high that year.²²⁵ Since October 2023, Israeli forces have arrested and taken into custody thousands of Palestinians in Gaza – mostly men and boys, but also some women and girls, including a woman over 80 years with Alzheimer’s disease.²²⁶ Humanitarian workers, including several UNRWA staff, are among those detained. There is ample evidence that Israeli authorities have targeted Palestinian activists, political figures, journalists and human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, for arbitrary arrest and detention.²²⁷

Following arrest, people are generally held in military facilities before being transferred to detention centres and prisons inside Israel and the occupied West Bank. Arbitrary arrests in the West Bank are also increasing.²²⁸

Sexual violence and abuse

OHCHR reports that ‘Israeli detention is characterized by widespread and systematic abuse and sexual and gender-based violence. These practices have increased significantly in severity and frequency since 7 October 2023’.²²⁹

Israeli forces use torture and other forms of cruel and inhuman treatment of detainees, including acts that may constitute sexualized torture or degrading treatment under international law. Women and girls in detention have reported being subjected to forced nudity, threats of sexual violence including rape, and physical assault of a sexual nature, including inappropriate and non-consensual touching by soldiers during interrogations and searches.²³⁰

The COI found that Palestinian women ‘were subjected to sexual violence in detention that amounts to the war crimes of committing outrages upon personal dignity and inhuman treatment, and the crime against humanity of other inhumane acts. In some cases, these acts amount to the war crime and crime against humanity of torture’.²³¹



Suhad is a mother to six children, in the most adverse circumstances. She fell pregnant with her sixth child during Israel’s war on Gaza and has been forced to navigate the challenges of pregnancy on top of battling to provide food and water for her existing family during bombardments, displacement and aid sieges. Photo by: Alef Multimedia

It concludes that the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees ‘is a result of an intentional policy that utilizes sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence to humiliate and degrade Palestinians in detention. This was observed across several facilities and temporary holding locations, during interrogation and while in transit’.²³²

Testimony: Beating on the genitals of a female detainee²³³

LS from East Jerusalem was detained in an Israeli police station. During a four-hour interrogation, she was forcibly undressed and subjected to severe beatings on her genitalia. She observed that cameras were filming the entire incident, which added to her sense of being violated and degraded.

Medical negligence and overcrowding in detention are common, and confiscation of clothes, including hijabs, is reported. **Women are deprived of sanitary pads, hygiene items and changes of clothes**. Israeli forces restrict bathroom use and deny women privacy during menstruation as a means of physical and psychological pressure.²³⁴ A female minor reportedly started her first period in prison, where she was denied proper sanitary products and subjected to ridicule and humiliation by Israeli prison staff.²³⁵

Testimony: Sexual harassment of female detainee²³⁶

Another female detainee recalled: ‘They searched me completely naked, and the female soldier asked me, while I was naked, to stand up and sit down several times. Throughout the interrogation, the [male] interrogator was touching the leg of the female soldier sitting right next to him and getting close to her in a sexual way. The interrogator also asked me questions of a sexual nature, [for example] “How many men have you slept with, and did you have fun with them?”’

At least two female Palestinians have reportedly been raped in detention, and others have been threatened with rape and sexual violence. For example, one female detainee told her lawyer that when she was detained and blindfolded, an officer threatened to rape her.²³⁷ Israeli forces reportedly take photos of female detainees in degrading circumstances and post them online.²³⁸

Detainees, including women and children, are subjected to physical assaults and beatings in military-run detention facilities. OHCHR reports that detainees have been subjected to prolonged blindfolding and deprivation of food, water, medical attention and sleep. Detainees are exposed to the cold for prolonged periods, forced to kneel on gravel, tortured with electric shocks, burnt with cigarettes, given hallucinogenic pills and subjected to blackmail and humiliation.²³⁹ It is common for male, female and child detainees to be asked to sign confessions written in Hebrew, which they do not understand.

Testimony: Female detainee forced to sign confession in Hebrew²⁴⁰

LM was strip searched several times in front of other Palestinian female detainees. Soldiers used sexualized language to humiliate her. They threatened her with rape, saying that this would be filmed and sent to a political leader]. Soldiers spat on her face repeatedly. LM was made to sign a ‘confession’ written in Hebrew, which she does not read or understand. She was then put under a six-month administrative detention.

Palestinian organizations report that one of the challenges they face in documenting such cases is that Israeli officers make threatening phone calls to women following their release, warning that they will be returned to prison or their family members will be harmed if they disclose their experiences in detention. **In addition to fear of reprisal, women may not report such violations due to trauma, shame or social stigma.**²⁴¹

Sexual and gender-based violence constitute grave violations of human rights, including the right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; the right to due process; the right to privacy; the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; and the right to be free from discrimination.²⁴²

Attacks on the environment

Violations by Israel's military forces and illegal Israeli settlers damage land, water and agriculture, severely impacting Palestinians' daily lives and undermining the possibility of self-determination. While such violations have been occurring for years, the genocide in Gaza has resulted in a colossal escalation of environmental destruction. According to the UN Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 86.1% of cropland in Gaza was damaged as of July 2025.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has also destroyed water supplies and disabled sewage treatment facilities, which have either been destroyed by military action or disabled by lack of power. This causes raw waste to flow across the land, polluting the Mediterranean sea and underground water reserves, which are essential for irrigating crops.²⁴³



Scene from Gaza showing the destruction and the unresolved waste management issues due to Israel's war on Gaza. Photo by: Clémence Lagouardat / Oxfam

Gaza's **agricultural infrastructure** has also been devastated: around 52.5% of agricultural wells and 44.3% of greenhouses were damaged as of September 2024, and damage has continued.²⁴⁴ The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) indicates that the uprooting of trees by military equipment has impacted topsoil and will make the land vulnerable to desertification.²⁴⁵ Vital wetlands, sand dunes, coastal waters and the only significant river, the Wadi Gaza, have all suffered extensive harm.²⁴⁶ UNEP also warns that Israel's plans to use seawater to flood the underground tunnels Hamas has dug beneath Gaza could contaminate the groundwaters beneath.²⁴⁷

Unexploded ordnance

It is estimated that by late 2024, the intensive use of explosive weapons had generated more than 42 million tonnes of debris which could be contaminated with asbestos and other polluting building materials, and may contain unexploded ordnance and biological waste.²⁴⁸ The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has warned that 5% to 10% of weapons fired into Gaza have failed to detonate, leaving behind deadly hazards, with more **unexploded ordnance** (UXO) being found every day.²⁴⁹ By the end of January 2025, at least 92 people had been killed or injured by explosive ordnance, and figures are expected to rise.²⁵⁰

Customary IHL requires parties to a conflict using explosive munitions to take constant care in the conduct of military operations in order to spare civilians. This means taking all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental civilian harm from their attacks, including from the resulting UXO. It requires that distinction must always be made between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks contrary to that, which result in leaving UXO, are prohibited.²⁵¹

The UN-led Gaza Debris Management Framework, which involves several UN agencies, was established with the aim of ensuring the safe removal of rubble and retrieval of bodies. However, its progress is hindered by UXO contamination and exposure to hazardous materials.²⁵² Immediate rehabilitation interventions are needed in Gaza to repair critical infrastructure, manage debris, retrieve bodies and address UXO contamination to enable safe population movement and to scale up humanitarian aid and the restoration of essential services.²⁵³

UXO results in disproportionate impact on the lives of women and girls who may themselves be injured by it, or who have to take on extra caring duties for family members who are injured. UXO may further curtail the freedom of women and girls, who already face restricted movement due to the illegal occupation and patriarchal norms. Men may lose their work due to disabilities resulting from UXO, leaving women to manage the household and family with very limited resources. Women who become disfigured or disabled or who lose the ability to have children or care for children as a result of UXO may be viewed as unsuitable wives and as burdens on their families, compounding their trauma.²⁵⁴

Destruction of farmland and grazing areas

Environmental destruction is not limited to Gaza. In the West Bank, illegal Israeli settlers carry out practices with extremely harmful environmental impacts. These include discharging untreated or inadequately treated industrial waste with wastewater onto Palestinian lands, leading to contamination that has serious implications for agricultural productivity and food availability, public health and biodiversity. It also results in the contamination of critical water systems, impeding essential farming practices such as crop diversification and further damaging Palestinians' livelihoods.²⁵⁵ There are at least seven illegal Israeli settler industrial zones in the West Bank, mainly on hilltops, which are leaching industrial wastewater into Palestinian land.²⁵⁶

The destruction of farmland and grazing areas has a particularly detrimental effect on women farmers, including Bedouins and herders, who shoulder the burden of household food security and survival. Farmers face spiralling debt as they are forced to pay for feed and water for their livestock because they are unable to access their fields or water resources, or because these resources have been polluted.²⁵⁷

While the specific impacts of environmental destruction in Gaza on women and girls are not yet fully understood, pollution and environmental degradation are having major detrimental effects on water, sanitation and hygiene. This has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, exacerbated by pre-existing inequalities and prejudicial social norms and practices. It undermines women's ability to secure adequate clean water for domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, family hygiene, and other tasks that are seen as their responsibility. Lack of clean water for personal hygiene will also particularly affect women and girls during menstruation.

Climate change and conflict are not gender neutral, and there is a strong link between climate change and the WPS Agenda. Climate change is a security threat, and its gendered impacts are similar to those women face in situations of conflict, including an increase in forced and early marriage, displacement, and rising rates of violence in the family and society, including gender-based and sexual violence.²⁵⁸ The vulnerabilities and marginalization of women and girls that existed before conflict lead to them experiencing its impacts disproportionately; these same vulnerabilities also mean women and girls are less able than men and boys to absorb and recover from climate shocks. Conflict often has devastating impacts on the climate, which in turn disproportionately impacts women and girls.

Security Council Resolution 2242 of the WPS Agenda recognizes the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls. The WPS Agenda therefore requires an integrated approach, with the full participation of women, that considers the impact of environmental destruction on human security and food sovereignty in conflict and as part of gender-sensitive recovery and peacebuilding.²⁵⁹

IHL also places an emphasis on the climate. Customary IHL protects civilian objects from attack and prohibits the use of methods or means of warfare that are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment.²⁶⁰ The Rome Statute of the ICC makes it a war crime to intentionally launch an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause 'damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated'.²⁶¹

Environmental degradation and natural resource scarcity will exacerbate further insecurity and instability in the OPT and create additional burdens on women and girls. It is therefore directly linked to the WPS Agenda.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Viewing what is happening in OPT today through the lens of the WPS Agenda is central to understanding the impact of Israel's illegal occupation on Palestinian women and girls, who routinely experience violations of their rights under international law that affect every aspect of their lives.

This report marking the 25th anniversary of the WPS Agenda shows how Israel's illegal occupation is a major obstacle to gender justice and to the realization of the human rights of Palestinian women and girls. It highlights how the UNSC's approach to WPS is missing the opportunity to directly address the impacts of the illegal Israeli occupation on women and girls, despite its responsibility for peace, security and its WPS Agenda.

The report also highlights the stark contradiction between States backing of the Agenda and Feminist Foreign Policies and their enabling of Israel to commit grave breaches and other serious violations of international law, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It sets out how the practices of the USA, Germany, Italy and the UK – the main exporters of arms to Israel – are not consistent with their declared commitment to gender equality.

Here we have set out how all States are under these obligations:

- **Not to recognize as legal** the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the OPT; not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation; and to ensure that any impediment resulting from the illegal presence of Israel in the OPT to the exercise of the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination must be brought to an end.
- Given the ICJ's confirmation that Palestinians in Gaza are under plausible imminent risk of acts of genocide with arms transferred to Israel likely to be used in committing these crimes, **States must not authorize the export of military goods to Israel**, or have military relations with it – that would also be in accordance with their obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty.
- To conduct **a review of all their transfer and trade agreements with Israel**. This is because the WPS Agenda and the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the OPT of July 2024 affirm the importance of compliance by all parties to armed conflict with international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international criminal law, and the Arms Trade Treaty. States need to act on these obligations and the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Occupied Palestinian Territory of July 2024.
- The UN Commission of Inquiry reminds all States that they are on notice that 'Israel may be or is committing internationally wrongful acts in both its conduct in the military operations in Gaza and its unlawful occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Thus, the Commission finds that, **unless States cease their aid and assistance to Israel in the commission of these acts, those States shall be deemed to be complicit in those internationally wrongful acts.**'¹²⁶²

Recommendations

1. Uphold international law and protect Palestinian women and girls

Obligations of Israel as the occupying power

- End its unlawful occupation of the OPT; lift the siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip; and allow the unimpeded passage and delivery of food, water, medical supplies, fuel, electricity and other essential goods to meet humanitarian needs.
- Implement the ICJ Advisory Opinion provisional measures, as well as the recommendations of the International Commission of Inquiry, UN Treaty bodies and special procedures, especially those that relate to Palestinian women.
- Ensure unimpeded access safety and freedom of movement for humanitarian workers and medical staff, and other civilians.
- Cease all acts of militarized violence against Palestinian women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, torture, ill-treatment, and arbitrary detention, and ensure prompt, independent and impartial investigations and accountability.
- Dismantle all illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall constructed by Israel situated in the OPT; end all policies and measures that alter the demographic composition of the territory; and evacuate all settlers.
- Revoke punitive demolitions, forced evictions and discriminatory housing policies including in East Jerusalem, and provide full reparation for the damage caused by internationally wrongful acts.
- Comply with principles of international humanitarian law in relation to the conduct of hostilities in an armed conflict, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack, and protection for civilian infrastructure including healthcare, education, food and water systems, and the natural environment essential for the survival of the civilian population.
- Ensure that all detainees are released unless promptly charged and tried according to fair trial procedures, applying non-discriminatory laws; and ensure that detention conditions strictly conform with international standards.
- Allow all Palestinians displaced during the illegal occupation to return to their original place of residence.

Obligations of the Palestinian Authority (WPS Pillars: participation & prevention):

- Institutionalize women's participation at all levels of peace, governance, and recovery processes, ensuring that women's voices shape policy, security, and negotiation frameworks.
- Reform discriminatory laws and address structural and cultural violence that perpetuate gender inequality.
- End all acts of violence against Palestinian women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence and ill-treatment.
- Ensure the full and effective implementation of the Palestinian National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, with dedicated budgets, personnel, and leadership from the Ministry of Women's Affairs to mainstream it across all ministries and local governance bodies.

2. Advance gender justice and accountability (WPS Pillars: protection & prevention)

Third States must:

- Fulfil their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law and prevent further violations, including acts amounting to genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- Uphold their obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty by ensuring full compliance with Article 6&7 to prevent transfers of arms, components, or technologies that might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international law, including gender-based violence.
- Examine and apply all available accountability options at national and international levels to address human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls, including restrictive measures.
- Ensure the implementation of the ICJ Advisory Opinion provisional measures, as well as the recommendations of the International Commission of Inquiry, UN Treaty bodies and special procedures, especially those that relate to Palestinian women.
- Ensure the implementation of the ICJ Advisory Opinion and its provisional measures, as well as the recommendations of the International Commission of Inquiry, UN Treaty Bodies, and Special Procedures, and other judicial accountability mechanisms. The ICC and, where applicable, national courts with jurisdiction and powers to do so should hold to account those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations, including those with specific impacts on Palestinian women.
- Utilise judicial accountability mechanisms at national and international levels. Cooperate with the ICC and, where applicable, enable national courts with jurisdiction and powers to hold those responsible to account for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations, including those with specific impacts on Palestinian women.
- Ensure that transitional justice includes gender-responsive processes and the meaningful participation of Palestinian women; and ensure that the survivors and their families have access to reparations and truth and psychological support

3. Align the WPS agenda with occupation and militarization (WPS Pillars: Participation & Prevention)

All UN Member States and States committed to WPS should:

- Report on measures taken to address Israel's occupation and related violations during annual WPS dialogues at the Security Council and the General Assembly.
- The United Kingdom, as WPS penholder, should engage meaningfully in advancing its mandate across all pillars, ensuring that WPS commitments apply equally in situations of occupation.
- Support an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza that ensures protection, dignity, and the meaningful participation of Palestinian women and girls in humanitarian response and peacebuilding efforts.
- Ensure immediate release of all Israeli hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinian prisoners, in accordance with international law.

4. Support and protect Palestinian women's leadership and Civil Society (WPS Pillars: participation & relief/recovery)

All parties and donors should:

- Ensure the rights and safety of Palestinian women human rights defenders, journalists, humanitarian workers, medics, and other professionals, and end arbitrary detention and harassment.
- Provide sustained and flexible funding to Palestinian women-led and human rights organizations to enable them to respond effectively to the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis.

- Consult regularly with Palestinian women and defenders of gender equality to inform policy, peace, and recovery processes based on their lived experience.
- Support and fund independent documentation initiatives by Palestinian civil society that integrate a gender lens to strengthen future accountability and justice efforts.
- Ensure that recovery and reconstruction in Gaza and the West Bank are locally led, gender-responsive, and environmentally sustainable, with women's full participation in design, decision-making, and implementation.

5. End Israel's unlawful occupation and prevent further violations (WPS Pillars: prevention & protection)

Third States must:

- Comply with their obligations under international law to neither recognize as legal nor aid or assist the maintenance of Israel's unlawful presence in the OPT, and to prevent trade, investment, or cooperation that sustains this situation.
- Terminate all forms of military cooperation, including the transfer or co-production of weapons, parts, components, and dual-use technologies with Israel, as these enable violations of international law.
- Suspend research, development, and military training partnerships with Israeli institutions.
- Ensure that illegal Israeli settlers do not access or benefit from transferred weapons.
- Implement collective measures through the UN General Assembly and Security Council to ensure that Israel's illegal occupation is brought to an end, and that Palestinians can exercise their right to self-determination.
- Ensure the dismantling of illegal Israeli settlements and the removal of settlers from the OPT.
- Ensure compliance with binding Orders of provisional measures of the ICJ (January, March and May 2024) and cooperate fully with international accountability mechanisms.

6. Integrate gender, climate, and environmental perspectives (WPS Pillars: relief & recovery)

All States and relevant institutions should:

- Integrate gender and environmental perspectives into peacebuilding, recovery, and climate resilience strategies, ensuring intersectional approaches in design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Support Palestinian women's rights organizations and environmental defenders working on peace, climate justice, and gender equality.
- Recognize and address the linkages between environmental degradation, climate change, and conflict in the OPT from a gender perspective

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2 Researchers who conducted the interviews come from the communities where these cases come from or are well connected to these communities. They ensured ethical considerations in interviews, with particular attention to trauma and protection. They spent a long time with each interviewed woman by herself and with her family to ensure that they did not feel pressurized, and to respond to any questions or concerns. Interviewed women were given the choice to have their names available for publication or not. Some women were approached for interviews but did not feel comfortable to do that, so the interviews did not proceed.

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Khadija from the Jordan Valley live in a remote small Palestinian community surrounded by a settlement, a checkpoint and a checkpoint. Settler violence is making life hard for her and her family who refused to leave and give up on their home. Photo by: Suhaib Jarrar

