



## Palestinian Women on March 8

The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development sends its warmest wishes and regards to all Palestinian women in our occupied homeland and the Diaspora and to all women of the Arab world and all over the world, on the International Women's Day. This occasion embodies the strife and struggle of women for freedom, equality and social justice and PWWSD emphasizes its commitment to walking the road towards ending the occupation and establishing a democratic sovereign civilian state on the boards of June 1967, to which Jerusalem is a capital. A state that works towards resolving the refugee issue in accordance with the internationally legitimate resolutions, mainly Decision 194, and that respects the rights of women as human rights that are indivisible and unequivocal. PWWSD considers itself part of the democratic women movement that aspires to change the societal conservative discourse, which is based on the consecration of inferiority and discrimination against women and the non-recognition of their rights as citizens. This manifests in the continued exclusion of women in national development and decision-making positions, which threatens the national and development Palestinian project, and the civilized progressive project in the Arab world as a whole. We believe that the stance on women issue was, and still is, the key indicator of democracy and progress in any country.

Despite that we recently witnessed a development in the concepts related to women rights, which emphasize full gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women, women still suffer from marginalization. In spite of the evolution of the mechanisms of international and national instruments in most countries to implement the rights of citizenship, which manifest in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Security Council Resolution 1325; and other international conventions, women are still facing discrimination and exclusion. Furthermore, cultural patterns reinforce the inferiority of women and exclusionary policies.

In Palestine, women's status quo is even more complicated. The ongoing Israeli occupation is the core reason for the suffering of Palestinian women and people. Palestinian women fight alongside men for the right to life, and human, social, and



economic security. Mainly, women and their families are the most affected by the consequences of the occupation, such as the apartheid wall which was built on confiscated Palestinian land and the division of 122 villages and towns; 30% of the West Bank population. These areas were turned into enclaves besieged by the wall and the green line, which led to the isolating citizens from their communities and necessary services, including health and education. These communities were the most affected by the ethnic cleansing, Judaization of Jerusalem, uprooting and displacement due to the demolition of "illegal" houses, and the confiscation of lands for constructing roads and settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem, which doubled in number since Oslo Agreement in 1993. In addition, the occupation still works on annexing the agricultural lands in Jordan Valley, which is considered the food basket of the West Bank, and it continues its aggression on the Gaza Strip, leaving it in destruction and with impacts that last for many years. Border crossings are still closed and Gaza is still under siege. Moreover, the occupation targets the economic life of men by confiscating lands, targeting the industry and destroying the infrastructure and facilities, apart from the political targeting of arresting and assassination, which impose additional burdens on the shoulders of Palestinian women. On the one hand, women-headed households are increasing in number on the economic and social levels, due to the abovementioned factors, and on the other hand, the community does not recognize women as heads of their households and subjects them to permanent community supervision.

PWWSD, as a fundamental part of the feminist movement, played a leading role on the national and women-rights levels in the Palestinian society. Throughout the stages of the Palestinian national struggle, PWWSD paid tremendous efforts to strengthen and empower women, and to increase their participation in the development processes, to demolish all discrimination forms against them. Many organizations consider women rights human rights, and women issues in Palestine are socio-political issues. As a result, the Palestinian national, social and economic society can only develop by the active participation of women based on equality in all fields.

In spite of the enormous role women play, and that the Palestinian Basic Law stipulates the principle of equality in terms of gender rights, and that Palestine is currently part of many international conventions and instruments including CEDAW, Palestine did not take the necessary measures to include the said as an essential reference in the Palestinian Basic Law. They were not published in the official Gazette to be of a mandatory nature. It also did not take necessary actions, policies or measures to change



the culture of discrimination against women and the perception of inferiority towards them, which hindered the progress of Palestinian women's status quo.

Hence, Palestinian women are still suffering from oppression on two levels: a national oppression due to the occupation and its repressive procedures that affect all life aspects, and social gender oppression due to the dominance of patriarchal concepts and culture that promote the inferiority of women. Palestinian women are still seen as recipients of policies not as policy-makers, and this is reflected in the obstacles Palestinian women face in terms of the legislative structure that is based on discrimination against women, particularly in the Family Law and the Penal Code in force. Furthermore, we witness gender-based violence, as well as women exclusion from political participation at the level of decision-making departments with what lines with their social and political roles, based on considering women rights as human rights.

The previously mentioned factors and circumstances affected women's status greatly and Palestinian women face discrimination at various levels. Despite the increasing trend of women education, they are still missing in the labor market. Their participation in the workforce in the Palestinian territories remains low and did not exceed 19% in 2016/2017, which is a very low rate compared to other places in the world. In addition, high rates of unemployment still rise among people in general and women in particular where the economic environment is still characterized by the decline in growth and few work opportunities. Even though limited, the expansion of employment opportunities tend to favor males to females, and the gender gap is still visible at the level of participation in the labor force, wage rate, and unemployment, especially among educated women. The same applies to the increase of poverty rate, mainly in the Gaza Strip, where it increases as the repressive Israeli measures increase. Women and children are considered the poorest of groups, and women carry additional burdens as a result. Here, the Labor Law fails in many aspects, which calls for its amendment to ensure the application of women economic rights; since that despite the adoption of the minimum wage law, the weakness of inspection and monitoring of law application deprived many women to taking advantage of it.

In another context, the domestic and community violence rate is still high in the Palestinian society. The results of a violence indicators survey in Palestine issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2011 show that about 37% of women were subject to a



form of violence by their husband (30% in the West compared to 51% in Gaza); 55% experienced economic violence, 54.8% social violence, 23.5% physical violence, and 11.8% sexual violence. These statistics do not reflect the actual rate of violence against women since official statements miss some cases and others go unreported for various reasons. Moreover, violence against women is not limited to domestic violence, according to the same survey, approximately 5% of women were subject to psychological violence in public, 1.3% were subject to sexual harassment, and 0.6% experienced physical violence also in public. There was a rise in women killing cases in recent years under different allegations. The survey also shows that there was an increase in the number of women resorting to safe houses after death threats. There are several reasons for these numbers, mainly the occupation, the economic situation, traditions, and the obstacles women face when trying to reach justice and the law, which leaves a negative impact on women. Although the feminist movement was able to make some achievements, including the suspension of Article 97 of the Penal Code, which was preceded by a presidential decree to abolish unfair clauses against women in the Penal Code in force that considered "honor" killing a crime punishable by law. However, these procedures are not enough to stop killing women and deterring aggressors, since they can still find ways to be inviolable. The legal environment that fosters discrimination against women, which does not deal with them as citizens of full rights, remains, especially in the legal absence of a Palestinian Family Law and a Penal Code. Women are still being deprived of their right to inheritance and are being subject to various forms of violence.

At the level of political participation and decision-making, women participation fluctuated due to the continued suspension of the presidential and legislative elections and postponement of local council elections more than once after they were supposed to take place in October 2016. Additionally, women are still being excluded from the reconciliation talks, especially in the reconciliation committees that emerged from the reconciliation agreements, in which women have no place. Yet, and as a result of the constant pressure of women movements on decision-makers, the Palestinian Central Council made a decision that emphasizes the need to adhere to taking necessary steps to implement the results of ratifying several international agreements, including CEDAW, a part of which is increasing women's quota to 30%. Despite this achievement, the challenge stands still in the processes and legal procedures to include the statements of these agreements in procedures, policies and local laws. As well, political parties must take an active role in the advancement of Palestinian women, both in the internal activities of the parties, or the participation of women in public life. Palestine joined



international conventions that oblige it to commit to equality in procedures, policies and laws, but the participation of women in political life remains weak, which manifests in the poor representation of Palestinian women in various decision-making departments.

The continuation of the suspension of the legislative environment because of the repressive measures of the occupation on the one hand, and having no horizons for a national reconciliation and the weak will of Palestinian decision-makers on the other affect the progress and status of Palestinian women in all fields. These factors and obstacles hinder the process of monitoring the application of Palestinian laws, such as the Labor Law and the Basic Law, and the adoption of important laws for women, such as the Family Law and the Penal Code. Even though Palestine's ratification of CEDAW is one qualitative achievement of women rights, the struggle for its inclusion in local laws is still a top priority and demand for Palestinian women.

IWD is an important occasion to Palestinian women and women all over the world, with all the meanings it holds of struggle and change that we look forward to achieving with regard to women status. The Palestinian women has ever been role models; they fight to achieve their demands as citizens of full rights, and seek liberation from the occupation that practices repressive policies ignoring international conventions; the International Humanitarian Law, the International Human Rights Law, and the fourth Geneva Convention, which obliges the occupying power to provide protection for civilians under occupation. We understand that the lack of respect to these conventions and charters leaves a significant impact on the priorities of Palestinian women and delays their gender-based progress.

March 8 remains an activation point for the national and social struggle of Palestinian women, and PWWSD continues to seek a free democratic Palestinian community based on social justice, gender equality, and elimination of all forms of discrimination. We work towards empowering and mobilizing women to participate in development processes and promote their civil rights as human rights.