



Calling upon Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention to Uphold their Obligation to End Collective Punishment in the Gaza Strip

21th of May, 2019- occupied Palestine

The story of the 5-year-old girl Aisha Lulu went viral over social media platforms this week. The majority of tweets and posts read: “Aisha died alone this week in a hospital in the West Bank after an aggressive brain tumour surgery. Israeli authorities prevented any of her family from accompanying her. Those who were around her said she died crying, unable to speak, and alone”. Gaza’s hospitals lack adequate equipment needed to treat serious illness as cancer, whether because of the denied flow of equipment and medicine or the frequent bombing on medical buildings and hospitals. The blockade also means that Israel controls all Palestinian borders and approves or denies travel permits for treatment purposes as it wishes. The family of Aisha was denied travel permits into the West Bank, and therefore Aisha was forced to travel alone, accompanied by a stranger. Despite the heart-breaking suffering of the innocent toddler and her family, and the thousands of Aisha and orphans in occupied Palestine, the international community remain soft in its responses and action.

Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, prohibits the collective punishment of civilians: “No protected person may be punished for an offense he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited”.

Israeli systematic and premeditated policies and practices of oppression are escalating within the extreme-right government politics, the support of the imperial tyranny of the US administration, in addition to the lack of action by the international community and third state parties that facilitate and perpetuate Israel’s material breaches of international law, and the culture of impunity it enjoys against its grave and consistent violations that amount to war crimes.

Collective punishment is one of Israel’s grimmest strategies of colonial oppression. It is indifferent in front of women, men and children. In East Jerusalem for instance, the frequent denial of family reunification requests and residency revocation constitute main collective punishment measures that have repercussions on the emotional and psychosocial well-being of families, let alone the fact that women do find themselves involuntarily bearing further social burdens. In the West Bank, civilians are at risk of house demolitions, checkpoints between Palestinian towns, night raids, land confiscation and expansion of illegal settlements and non-State violence. Other punitive measures specific to the Gaza Strip include repercussions correlated with an established 12-year-old open-air prison. The occupation launched 3 massive offensives in the Strip since the blockade, with thousands of casualties and injuries. During the 7-week war in 2014 alone, more than 1,462 civilians were killed, according to OCHA; among whom 551 were children and 299 were women. The young generation born after 2007 alone, who are now no older than 12 years, have witnessed three dreadful wars in a lifetime. The report summary of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza war indicates that “11,231 Palestinians were injured; including 3,436 children and 3,540 women, 10 percent of whom suffer permanent disability”. Another

data featured in the same report is that “1,500 Palestinian children were orphaned”. Within the same year, the Health Cluster in Gaza Strip declared that “73 medical facilities and many ambulances were damaged”¹.

The indiscriminate collective punishment in Gaza is longstanding. During March 2018, Israeli forces used lethal and excessive force against civilians marching peacefully for their Right to Return. The unnecessary and disproportionate force used live fire and a shoot to kill strategy against non-violent and unarmed demonstrators of all ages. The targeting of children is premeditated in war strategies the occupation had adopted throughout the agenda on gradual ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. According to Graça Machel, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, as she declared in the first U.N. “Children in War” report in 1996: “Children are not just getting caught in the crossfire, they are also likely to be specific targets”. She went on: “When ethnic loyalties prevail, a perilous logic clicks in. The escalation from ethnic superiority to ethnic cleansing to genocide, as we have seen, can become an irresistible process. Killing adults is then not enough; future generations of the enemy—their children—must also be eliminated.”

The absence of human security, fundamental freedoms and basic rights in the Strip have made life unbearable. Civilians are subjected to restrictions on movement; prohibition of flow of medicine; denied permit to get medical treatment outside the Strip, or get adequate access to treatment inside; in addition to lack of basic needs such as clean water, electricity, nutrition, health and education.

Therefore, the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD) calls for the immediate and paramount:

- Commitment towards a just and durable political peace for Palestinians, beyond economic propositions of “Deal of the Century”, that guarantees their Right to Self-determination as enshrined in international law
- Upholding of the obligation of High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention to respect the Convention by taking concrete accountability measures against the occupation and end of blockade on Gaza
- Commitment to the Arms Trade Treaty which entails ending all weapons supply to Israel, and reiteration of demand for a complete and immediate military embargo on the apartheid state of Israel.
- Provision of protection for Palestinian women and girls according to the framework of CEDAW and UNSCR 1325.

¹ According to Health Cluster, Gaza Strip: Joint Health Sector Assessment Report, September 2014.