

The effect of Israeli settlements on Palestinian women

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Palestinian women endure immense hardships resulting from the Israeli occupation's policies, coupled with the challenges of poverty, siege, ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, and the escalating terrorism orchestrated by settlers. We pray for mercy for martyrs like Reham Dawabsha from the village of Duma, who, along with her family, fell victim to an attack by terrorist "price tag" settler gangs, burning their home with incendiary materials in 2015. We also remember Aisha Al-Rabi from the village of Bidya, Salfit district, martyred in 2018 when settlers threw stones at her car. Numerous incidents, such as the attempted kidnapping of the child Hala Al-Qat by settlers in the village of Madama, underscore the ongoing threat faced by Palestinian women.

Examining the impact of settlements on Palestinian women requires revisiting a critical historical moment — the Oslo Accords in 1995. Initially designed to last five years, the failure of negotiations in 2000 left us with the reality that 60 percent of the West Bank, Areas A and B, remained under complete Israeli occupation control, with settlement expansion and settler numbers reaching record highs.

Focusing on Area C, constituting 60 percent of the West Bank, we observe that much of this land is exclusively designated for military training, natural reserves,

or settlements. Some parts are deemed "state land" by the occupation authorities, violating international humanitarian law, and allocated for settler use, depriving Palestinian landowners of their rights. In this article, we delve into the specific challenges faced by Palestinian women in Area C and similar zones due to occupation practices.

In Area C, Palestinian women contend with dire conditions marked by the absence of infrastructure and essential services. The complex circumstances imposed by occupation measures significantly contribute to violence, marginalisation, and the denial of basic rights and opportunities for women. Their prospects are curtailed due to harassment, occupation practices, settler attacks, and the lack of necessary health and social services. Geographical isolation, poverty, conservative traditions, and military occupation further restrict women's movements, creating an environment of fear and societal constraints.

Women in these areas also face economic, educational, and political disadvantages. Families live under constant threats of house demolitions and forced displacement, exemplified by Khirbet Humsa Al-Fawqa. This area has been abandoned by the occupation, witnessing multiple home demolitions and over 11 evacuations for military training, pushing the population to emigrate and transforming the region into a hub for settlement activities. Agricultural tools and property are confiscated, and livestock breeders face persecution. Women endure significant psychological pressure, feeling unable to provide care for their families amid these challenges. Moreover, they are subjected to direct violence from occupation soldiers and settlers, even within their homes.

Limited educational opportunities arise due to infrastructure absence, insufficient schools, housing shortages, and movement restrictions. Economic prospects are confined to unpaid work in agriculture, livestock, or settlements, often under

harsh conditions. Entrepreneurial projects face obstacles like financial barriers and a complex permit system that restricts women's movements. Access to medical services is challenging due to disruptions caused by the occupation and settlers.

Palestinians in Area C lack control over their resources and struggle to obtain permits for home construction, leading to the constant threat of demolitions. Settlement expansion restricts Palestinians' access to their livelihoods and water sources. The monopoly of the Israeli water company, "Amkrot," deprives Palestinians of well-digging opportunities, exacerbating water scarcity. Women also experience abuse from occupation authorities, including electricity service deprivation and difficulties using solar panels for lighting.

In Hebron, after the 1997 Hebron Protocol, which divided the city into H1 and H2 areas, Palestinian control is limited to 80 percent, while the remaining 20 percent is under Israeli control. Women in the H2 area face severe violations of their rights, with restricted freedom of movement and harassment from occupation soldiers and settlers. Racial discrimination is evident, subjecting Palestinians to military laws while settlers enjoy Israeli civil law. The suffering of women in Hebron exemplifies the harsh realities imposed by occupation policies and discriminatory practices.

In Jerusalem, women endure the harsh consequences of Israeli occupation policies, which include forced transfers and a silent ethnic cleansing strategy. Homes are demolished, or Jerusalemites are compelled to demolish their own houses to evade heavy fines imposed by the occupation for lacking a license. Jerusalem residents are rarely granted construction licenses, furthering the goal of depopulating the city's original inhabitants to make room for settlement expansion. When families are displaced, women bear the heaviest burden, often

forced to live in new houses without privacy. Additionally, women in Jerusalem live in constant fear of potential residency revocation, ID withdrawal, and family separation.

The suffering of women is evident near the separation and annexation wall, described by former US President George Bush Jr. as winding through the West Bank like a snake. In the West Bank and Jerusalem, the wall adversely impacts the lives of Palestinians in the seam zones. Women in these areas experience poor housing conditions, struggle to obtain essential services and education, and face a challenging permit system that disrupts family and social life. This situation results in a lack of job opportunities and inadequate transportation means, significantly affecting their lives and livelihoods.

In the Gaza Strip, women have endured unprecedented suffering due to Israel's wars in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2019. The devastation caused by these conflicts includes the destruction of homes, loss of lives, displacement, and the anguish of providing for families amid poverty and siege. Displaced women face double challenges, grappling with the difficulties of shelter provision while recognising the security and stability that housing represents for their families. The lasting impact of these conflicts continues to affect women in the Gaza Strip.

What are the requirements needed to protect women in light of this reality?

It is crucial to implement a comprehensive plan for safeguarding women in seam zones and those most susceptible to violations. This involves offering economic support, such as small grants for establishing production or service projects, thereby ensuring a consistent income for a dignified life. Furthermore, women in these areas require legal, psychological, and social assistance to cope with the traumas inflicted by the occupation.

International Resolution 1325 must serve as a foundation for shielding women from human rights violations, emphasising the imperative to grant access to services and justice during armed conflicts, as stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Conventions and their annexes. These conventions mandate the occupying power to safeguard civilians under occupation. Additionally, official and civil entities, particularly the General Union of Palestinian Women and women's advocacy groups, should actively monitor and document violations targeting women. They should expose the practices and crimes of the occupation forces and settler groups, compiling comprehensive files for submission to the International Criminal Court. This includes cases where Palestinian women were victims of violence perpetrated by the occupation forces and settler groups.

The international community must fulfil its legal and moral responsibilities in protecting civilians under occupation, with a specific focus on women.

Simultaneously, efforts should be directed towards establishing a legal framework that safeguards women's rights. This involves aligning local laws and legislation with pertinent international laws and treaties ratified by the country, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These laws should actively combat discrimination faced by women.