

The Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel

PRESS RELEASE
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UN Committee Poses 18 Questions to Israel Regarding Discrimination Against Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, for Urgent Response

The UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (the Committee) has published the list of issues and questions it put to the State of Israel regarding the position of women in Israel. 18 of the 30 issues and questions asked by the Committee to Israel were directly related to concerns detailed in the NGO Alternative Report submitted by the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel (the Working Group), involving Israel's lack of compliance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) regarding Palestinian women citizens of Israel in all spheres of life. The 18 issues and questions covered almost all fields, including violence against women, participation in public life and decision-making, education and stereotypes, employment and economic empowerment, health, rural and vulnerable women, and family and personal status law.

The publication of the list of issues follows the Committee's initial review of Israel's Third Periodic Report submitted in 2001, the Working Group's Alternative Report, and a further Alternative Report on the position of Palestinian women in the 1967 Palestinian Occupied Territories (OPTs). Israel's Third Periodic Report did not pay sufficient attention to the position of Palestinian women citizens of Israel, and failed to provide adequate data revealing the large gap which exists between the positions of Jewish and Palestinian women, the latter of whom suffer from compound discrimination due to their national belonging as well as as their gender. Nor did Israel detail any steps or measures, either already taken or planned, in order to fully implement the CEDAW with respect to Palestinian women citizens of Israel. The Working Group therefore submitted the Alternative Report with the aim of highlighting the historical and institutional discrimination to which Palestinian women are subjected. The report contained statistics and facts which illustrate the Government of Israel's blatant discrimination against Palestinian women citizens of Israel.

In addition to submitting its alternative report, a representative of the Working Group, Attorney Sonia Boulus, together with a representative of Palestinian organizations in the OPTs, Ms. Maha Abu Dia-Shamas, participated in a pre-sessional meeting held at the UN in New York in January 2005. The representatives raised the major points from the Alternative Reports in an attempt to present a realistic and precise picture of the position of Palestinian women in Israel and the OPTs. Israel is scheduled to submit its answers and the requested information within six weeks of receiving the list of issues. The Working Group will prepare an expanded report on the points raised by the Committee, and will submit it before the Committee's final review of Israel's Third Periodic Report in July 2005.

The Working Group will hold a Study Day to present the Working Group's Alternative Report, to promote the CEDAW as an international mechanism to help secure rights for Palestinian women in Israel. The Study Day is also an opportunity for gathering information from resource experts on the position of Palestinian women citizens of Israel in all fields of life, in order to gather additional data for the Working Group's expanded report to the Committee. The Study Day will be held in the Sami Ramis Hall, Shafa'Amr, on 9 April 2005.

The Committee's **List of Issues and Questions** for Israel included the following:

The Constitution, legislation and national machinery for the advancement of women

- In its previous concluding comments, the Committee "recommended that the right to equality and the prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination against women should be reflected" in the Basic Laws. Please provide information on steps taken in that regard.
- In its previous concluding comments, the Committee strongly suggested that the Government of Israel take necessary steps to eliminate "forced marriages, female genital

mutilation, honour killings and polygamy." Please provide statistical data on those practices, as well as on measures taken by the Government for their elimination.

Violence against women

- Please provide information on the budgetary allocations made for shelters and centres for treatment and prevention of domestic violence. Has there been any attempt to collaborate and partner with non-governmental agencies to provide comprehensive services and housing options to victims of domestic violence?

Participation in public life and decision-making

- The report notes that Arab women have significantly lower levels of participation in all spheres of public life and decision-making — the judiciary, the legislature, law enforcement, the civil service, and the private sector. Please provide updated statistical data regarding Arab and Jewish women's participation in these fields, and comment on what measures have been taken to increase the active participation of Arab women in each of them.

Education and stereotypes

- The report provides some disaggregated data and makes reference to the significantly lower levels of educational achievements among Arab women and girls, and the extremely low proportion of Arab women among academic staff in Israeli universities. However, the report provides no information on what government programmes are in place to advance Arab girls' educational progress or promote the inclusion of Arab women as members of the academic staff at universities. Please provide such information and information on the impact of such programmes in relation to their stated goals.

Employment and economic empowerment

- Given the multiple discrimination faced by Arab women in the workforce, please provide statistical data on their participation in the workforce, and information on policies and measures in place to increase their participation at all levels of the labour force.

Health

- Please provide updated and sex-disaggregated data on health indicators, such as rates of infant mortality; low birth weight; maternal mortality; immunizations; and overall life expectancy among Jewish and non-Jewish populations, as well as the prevalence of diseases, including depression, among both populations. Please include a qualitative analysis of the trends and patterns with regards to the health of women in each of these populations.
- The report states that "an astoundingly low percentage of Arab women are treated by female doctors", and acknowledges Arab women's consequent reluctance to consult a family doctor or specialist, even when medical attention is necessary. Please provide information on efforts to increase the number of Arab women in tertiary education, especially in medicine and health sciences, so as to increase, within time bound-targets, the number of Arab women doctors.

Rural and vulnerable women

- Please provide comprehensive information on the implementation of article 14 of the Convention with respect to Bedouin women and girls.
- The report notes that Bedouin girls leave school at an early age owing to financial constraints. Has the State party considered instituting scholarship programmes for Bedouin and immigrant girls in order to address the lack of resources among these communities? If not, what other programmes are in place to promote Bedouin and immigrant girls' participation in the educational sector?

Family and personal law

- Please explain which personal status laws apply to Arab women, and provide further information on these laws with respect to a woman's rights within the family and religious spheres.

- The report states that, although the minimum age for marriage is 17, the prevalence of underage marriage, both via petition and without approval, remains high. Please explain why the law prohibiting underage marriage is not better enforced.

The member organizations of the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel are:

Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, <http://www.adalah.org>
Al-Tufula: The Pedagogical and Multipurpose Women's Center, <http://www.tufula.org>
Arab Association of Human Rights (HRA), <http://arabhra.org>
Kayan: Feminist Organization, <http://www.kayan.org.il>
Maan: The Forum of Bedouin Women
Women Against Violence (WAV), <http://www.wavo.org>

For more information on the report and/or the contributing member organizations, please contact:

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* The Alternative Report on the position of Palestinian Women in the 1967 Palestinian Occupied Territories was submitted jointly by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid & Counselling, Al-Haq, and the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights – Gaza. This report is the first such report submitted on Palestinian women in the OPTs. Significantly, the Committee's list of issues and questions for Israel included, also for the first time, four items on the subject of Palestinian women in the OPTs. One question asked Israel to provide information on whether the CEDAW has been implemented "throughout the territory under its jurisdiction." Another focused on the effects of the occupation on the education of girls. In a further question, the Committee asked Israel to "comment on the availability of health services to Arab women and describe what measures are being taken to improve health delivery to non-Jewish women and girls, given the restricted mobility and construction of a wall inside the Occupied Territories." The Committee also expressed its deep concern regarding the lack of food and water resources "owing to road blockades and limited access to foreclosed areas."