



30 years & beyond: WCLAC Continues  
to forward Women's Human Rights



للارشاد القانوني والاجتماعي



Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

**Learning, Sharing Knowledge, Mobilizing the Society  
& Empowering Palestinian Women Through  
Innovation to Create Change.**

**WCLAC Annual Report**

**2022**

## **The Introductory Message of WCLAC's General Director**

Reviewing the events of 2022, despite all the efforts we made as a feminist human rights organization to achieve our goals towards equality and respect for women's human rights, I sadly conclude that this year was the peak of the multiple and disproportionate attacks against feminist organizations and human rights defenders. WCLAC regularly document Israeli violations against Palestinian women and their families to make the voices of women and girls heard. We used all means to make those voices heard to make Israel, the occupying power, accountable for its grave breaches of International Humanitarian Law and the flagrant violations of International Human Rights Law. This was through our advocacy campaigns, delegation field visits, and submissions to international human rights mechanisms through our consultative status with the United Nations.

We highlighted the gendered impact and the negative and disproportionate impact of Israeli violations on Palestinian women and girls through Israeli policies of home demolitions, excessive use of force and extra-judicial killings, restrictions of movement, the blockade on the Gaza Strip, night raids, arrest of thousands of Palestinians, child home arrests, intimidation of the civilian population by Israeli occupation forces and settlers, expropriation of land and natural resources, and destruction of property and agricultural land. As the evidence-based data gathered by WCLAC reveal, these practices have specifically impacted Palestinian women and increased their burdens within the family and the household, and further emphasized their traditional roles within the Palestinian patriarchal society. Palestinian women, being the main caregivers within the family had to endure the negative implications of all these practices.

Family reunification policies and residency rights for Palestinians, especially women married to Jerusalemites increased the sufferings of women, especially in situations where their marriages collapse and women become victims of domestic violence. This, combined with Israeli policies and discriminatory laws increases male domination over women who are heavily dependent on their husbands to apply for long-term residency permits or family reunification applications. Due to the dualistic legal system in Jerusalem which was illegally annexed by Israel in 1967, court rulings in Jerusalem cannot be implemented in the West Bank and vice-versa. Often Palestinian women married to Jerusalemites endure domestic violence in order not to lose their rights to custody, maintenance, or even the ability to obtain a residency permit. This shows the double jeopardy of Israeli occupation and its policies intersecting with male domination, and unbalanced power relations within a structured patriarchal society, which work in favor of men in most cases.

In 2022, we witnessed that journalists and human rights defenders were specifically targeted by the Israeli occupation forces and silenced either by being arrested, kept under home arrest as was the case with Lama Ghosheh from Jerusalem after a post she made on Facebook, or killed while covering events on the ground as was the situation with the murder of Al-Jazeera reporter last May, Shireen Abu-Aqleh who was killed in cold blood. The 23 years old journalist Nisreen was

also shot with a rubber bullet in her head while covering the events in Jerusalem although she was wearing a vest identifying her as a journalist. She was also beaten by Israeli soldiers and lost hearing in one of her ears after this attack. Despite that, the sense of unrivaled determination and resiliency is the answer, where in testimonies gathered by WCLAC from women journalists we heard statements like “we will not be silenced like this”, “despite the attacks, we will keep our voices loud and clear for the world to hear”, “we will stand tall in face of the arrogant occupation” and many other statements of similar nature.

Human rights defenders and organizations, including feminist organizations were targeted and stigmatized as “terrorist organizations” including two women-led feminist organizations, as well as prominent human rights organizations with professional records in the field of human rights and expertise in international law such as Al-Haq and Defense for Children/ Palestine section. This is only because of the ability of those human rights organizations to expose Israeli crimes against Palestinian civilians and bring evidence-based data that can stand in the International Criminal Court, or due to their influential advocacy efforts to highlight Israeli flagrant violations of international law. The decision of the International Criminal Court to start an investigation into Israeli war crimes is only one among many examples reflecting this influence. The decision of the UN General Assembly to request a legal opinion from the International Court of Justice regarding the implication of a prolonged Israeli military occupation after the recommendation of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry is another example. Numerous reports of national and international human rights organizations such as Al-Haq, B’Tselem, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International provided evidence-based data of an Israeli apartheid regime in the context of an Israeli colonial expansionist occupation. Even the UN Special Rapporteur, Francesca Albanese, who is an independent expert monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), was attacked immediately after her appointment by the UN Human Rights Council, prevented from entering the OPT and subjected to a smear Israeli campaign to fire her from office for reporting on the situation in the OPT and for emphasizing principles of international law and the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination.

On another front, Palestinian human rights defenders and feminist organizations witnessed another major back-clash at the national level which reached its peak in 2022, with the harsh smear campaigns and attacks to which they were subjected by traditional and conservative elements and political Islamists who abused religion to carry out their attacks against feminist organizations and individual human rights defenders. They attacked them and incited against them on social media and within their communities, labeling them the “CEDAW” followers who carry “foreign agendas” and aim at destructing the hegemony of Palestinian families as well as intending to brain-wash the minds of children and younger generations of boys and girls through their educational and awareness-building programs at schools and within society. Feminist organizations like the Women’s Studies Center were openly attacked in Mosques and on social media for their work in schools on extra-curriculum activities and awareness-building programs

related to child marriage and programs educating children at schools to protect themselves from sexual harassment and how to protect themselves from those attempts when happening and preserve their bodily integrity. The director of the Center was personally attacked, and school principals were threatened in order not to allow those programs to continue at schools. In Friday preaches at mosques, names of persons and organizations were mentioned and tremendous pressure was put on the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MOE) who finally submitted to those pressures and canceled all agreements and memorandums of understanding with feminist and civil society organizations at Palestinian schools. The MOE claimed that they wish to review manuals developed by the Women's Studies Center and other civil society organizations, although initially developed and reviewed by the MOE. Finally, they decided to stop all programs, easily reflecting the submission of the government to those pressures, and reflecting the absence of any political will to stand against those conservative and traditional elements within society who are against any form of change within Palestinian society.

WCLAC also had its share and I was personally attacked on social media and all platforms for our call for the adoption of the Family Protection Bill, and the harmonization of national legislation with Palestine's commitment to international human rights treaties to which Palestine had acceded including the CEDAW. They attacked WCLAC and al-Muntada to Combat Violence against Women and used a social, cultural, and religious discourse that is acceptable within society claiming that WCLAC and other feminist organizations call for *inter-alia*, extra-marital relations, safe abortion, equality between husband and wife within the marriage, LGBT rights and sexual freedoms. They also attacked us for our efforts to raise the age of marriage and campaign against child marriage and our calls for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence. They also tried indirectly to create a sectorial divide by highlighting names of feminist human defenders to show that they are "Christians" and have no right to address sharia-based personal status laws, by giving a "sacred" nature to "man-made" laws and depriving us as women of our right to full citizenship, no matter whether we are Moslems or Christians, as well as depriving us as feminist and civil society organizations from our right to lobby and advocate against GBV and call for modern laws, legislation, and policies based on gender-based equality and respect of women's human rights. WCLAC's regular two-year report on Femicide was specifically attacked and described as a "stupid" report!

Conducting awareness-building campaigns against sexual harassment of children at schools or against child marriage, providing legal aid and services for women and girls victims of gender-based violence, or even protecting the victims of domestic violence whose very existence is at risk, are all met with attacks, smear campaigns including serious and life-endangering attacks on social media with complete inaction on part of the official duty-bearers and the absence of a political will on part of the Palestinian government to take measures to protect us from those attacks and make those persons accountable for their acts.

On the contrary, the third serious jeopardy we faced as feminist organizations is the absence of the political will to take action and due-diligence responsibilities by the Palestinian government. Feminist organizations and women human rights defenders were left at the forefront to confront those conservative elements within society. The Public Prosecutor when approached, encouraged us to file complaints which will be seriously investigated as we were told. Some feminists decided to file those complaints and access the judicial system but all efforts did not bring results. The social media and smear campaigns continued unabated. Women activists and human rights defenders were and are still left to confront those attacks, while the Palestinian government found an excuse to delay the passage of the so-called “controversial Family Protection Bill” which still requires further dialogue and social debate before its adoption as they claimed. The Palestinian government forgot that the State of Palestine, and not feminist organizations had acceded to international human rights treaties and conventions and that such accession entails legal obligations to take the necessary measures to end all forms of discrimination and harmonize national legislation with those moral and legal commitments which they made.

Despite that WCLAC and other feminist and women’s and women-led organizations strongly believe in our cause and continue our efforts to end GBV and call for gender equality and non-discrimination. We remain optimistic that we can influence change and make official duty-bearers accountable for their inaction. We continue our programs and efforts to raise awareness among men and women on numerous relevant issues, to provide legal aid and psycho-social support, to freely litigate in family courts, to protect women and girls victims of GBV, and to work to widen our allies and supporters within our local communities through social mobilization programs, working with community-based organizations, volunteers, youth clubs and young men and women encouraging them to make initiatives in their local communities and become catalysts for change. We believe that achieving our goals can only be made through keeping our work on the ground with our local communities and strongly believing in what we do and our ability to influence change.

The narrative report of WCLAC for 2022 which I am pleased to share with you highlights those efforts and achievements as well as the main challenges we faced in conducting our work. Despite all constraints and obstacles, perhaps the best way to succeed and make achievements is to keep our morale high, our passion for the work we do, and our ability to contribute to change and to a better world where we all live with dignity and respect for human rights.

Randa Siniora

General Director/WCLAC

# Annual Report 2022

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# Part I. Summary Report

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## Political Brief

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### International Humanitarian Law Violations (IHL)

Israel continues its military measures against Palestinians in a breach to international human rights and humanitarian laws.

### *The Citizenship and Entry Law*

In March 2022 the Israeli Knesset gave the final approval to the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Bill. The Citizenship Law entails that Palestinian living in the West Bank or Gaza cannot be granted Israeli citizenship or a residency permit to live in Israel and occupied East Jerusalem. The purpose of this Law is to “establish restrictions on citizenship and residence in Israel by citizens or residents of hostile countries or from the region, alongside irregular arrangements for residence licenses or permits to stay in Israel—all while taking into consideration the fact that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state, and in a manner that will ensure safeguarding of vital interests for the state's national security.”<sup>1</sup> This law will deny thousands of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem or citizens of the Green Line from applying for family unification with their spouses who are Palestinian residents or citizens of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip unless the male spouse is over the age of 35 and the female spouse is over the age of 25. Based on the Bill, the Minister of Interior will be required to form a dedicated humanitarian committee to examine applications for reasons of domestic violence. A final decision from the minister on an application submitted to the committee will be issued within three months. Further, the maximum annual quota of licenses or permits for humanitarian reasons will be identical to the number of applications approved in 2018. In the future, the Minister of Interior will be able to issue an order—with the approval of the Government and the Knesset—determining a new maximum annual quota of licenses or permits, subject to a recommendation presented by the Knesset House Committee. But the quota of requests accepted by that committee should not exceed 58 applications.<sup>2</sup>

Palestinian men over 35 and women over 25 are allowed a permit to “stay” with their spouses in Jerusalem or the Green Line (Art. 4), but the stay permit has to be annually renewed and grants no social or economic rights or even health insurance.<sup>3</sup> Given that more than 70% of the cases WCLAC follows in East Jerusalem are related to women who hold different ID than their spouses (women hold Jerusalem ID and their spouses have West Bank ID or vice versa), women will dramatically suffer from adoption of this Bill. Their suffering will multiply through their inability to reside in one place with their spouses, the possibility of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://m.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/press10322w.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://m.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/press10322w.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ilac.ps/details.php?id=i5odbbba2295y2r34zkmv5>

losing the custody of their children and endure multilayered discrimination against them as women and as Palestinians living in East Jerusalem.

According to the UN General Assembly report of the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the HRC that took place in 2016, the law displays blatant discrimination, which in result has separates husbands from wives, parents from children, and extended families from one-another, and caused traumatic complications for women attempting to remain with their families both in Jerusalem and in the West Bank.<sup>4</sup>

Palestinian women from the West Bank and other parts of the oPt married to Jerusalemites, are often denied temporary residency permits and family reunification despite being married for decades to holders of Jerusalem identity documents or Israeli citizens. These women explained to WCLAC in their recent testimonies that after the Israeli authorities suspended their temporary residency permit, they stopped going out of the house except for urgent necessity, as their presence is “illegal” and they are often terrified to be caught by the police.

In cases of divorce or disputes between spouses holding different identity documents, family reunification procedure is often denied for women with Palestinian Identity Documents. Hence, women face difficulties in accessing courts to follow-up on their child custody cases due to the restriction of movement, as well as denial of other basic services that are obtained once Palestinians have the residency permit, such as access to healthcare services, health insurance and other services.

Many women endure domestic violence to stay with their children in Jerusalem being heavily dependent on their husbands for obtaining annual residency permits from the Israeli Ministry of Interior (MOI). They also cannot secure custody of their children due to conflicting legal systems, lack of access to justice and difficulties in implementing court rulings under two different legal jurisdictions. For instance, women live in fear of being separated from their children in the case they are forcibly transferred. Palestinian women who live in Jerusalem lose their temporary residency permits through a family unification procedure if the husband decides to divorce. If the children have Jerusalem I.D and remain with the father, women will no longer be able to live in the same city as their children, or even visit them. If a woman is a victim of violence in the household, she will be reluctant to go to the Israeli authorities for fear of being forcibly transferred outside Jerusalem and losing her children’s custody.<sup>5</sup> Hence, divorced women will have to remain locked in at the family home without any legal status, and they will be stripped of their fundamental rights such as the right to movement or work, in addition to the psychological impact of social stigma of being a divorcee.

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<sup>4</sup> “Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, United Nations General Assembly, 20 Jan. 2016,

[http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/\\_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_31\\_44\\_E.doc&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A_HRC_31_44_E.doc&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1)

<sup>5</sup> To reinstate a Jerusalem I.D., Palestinians have to prove their “center of life” is Jerusalem for a minimum period of 2 years.

However when they do not have any legal status, this means that these women have to live 2 years without any legal status in the city.



WCLAC conducted interviews with women and published a report<sup>6</sup> addressing how the lengthy process of reunification applications leaves women in a state of financial and social limbo, not being able to access health insurance, social security benefits, or well-paid work.

Israel has used a variety of discriminatory methods to reduce the Palestinian population of Jerusalem, to maintain demographic majority. Since the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, Palestinians were treated as immigrants in their own country, the Minister of Interior has discretionary powers to revoke residency.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Palestinians living in Jerusalem and who are married from different identity documents holders are not granted equal access to the enjoyment of their rights in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In contrast, The Israeli Law of Return that was passed in 1950 grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen. This is a clear violation of art 2, 26, and 18 of the Covenant (ICCPR). The Law of Return was then amended in 1970 to allow for the expansion of immigration, and to grant the right of migration to non-Jewish offspring of Jewish origin until the third generation. In addition, the Israeli Citizenship Law, which was amended in 1980, enables every Israeli to enjoy Israeli citizenship, whether inside Israel or Abroad. Contrary to dealing with Palestinians living in Jerusalem, who are denied the right to citizenship and family reunification by the same law that legally guarantees other civil and political rights.

Israel is still imposing residency revocation against the Jerusalem population, as a direct tool utilized to forcibly transfer Palestinians from East Jerusalem. According to Israel's MoI, Israel has revoked the status of 14,701 Palestinians from East Jerusalem between 1967 and 2020, on the claims that their status "expired of itself".<sup>8</sup> Since the beginning of 2022 the Israeli authorities demolished, confiscated, or forced people to demolish 50 Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

Israel also revokes health and social security entitlements as a punishment to family members of alleged attackers, which is entitled as a form of collective punishment. These policies have disastrous consequences on the lives of Palestinian women and children. The UN Human Rights Committee observing the ICCPR has noted that the prohibition against collective punishment is non-derogable, even in states of emergency. Often, women also have to face the psychological ill-treatment that Israel imposes on them through arrests, detentions, house raids, as well as the detention of bodies of deceased family members, kept in Israeli fridges for months before being returned to the family for burial.

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<sup>6</sup> "Women's Voices: In the Shadow of the Settlements", Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling, 2010, [http://www.wclac.org/english/userfiles/English%20WCLAC%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.wclac.org/english/userfiles/English%20WCLAC%20(2).pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Article 11(A) of the Law of Entry to Israel of 1952: "The Minister of the Interior may at his discretion...cancel any permit of residence under this Law."

<sup>8</sup> Hamoked, Ministry of Interior data: 18 East Jerusalem Palestinians were stripped of their permanent residency status in 2020 as part of Israel's "quiet deportation" policy; 10 of them women; 9 March, 2021 Retrieved from: <https://hamoked.org/document.php?dID=Updates2224>

<sup>9</sup> [Protection of Civilians Report | 2-15 August 2022 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory \(ochaopt.org\)](https://ochaopt.org/reports/protection-of-civilians-report-2-15-august-2022/)

## House Demolitions

Israel's policy of demolitions, evictions and displacement continues unabated. In 2022, the number of demolished Palestinian-owned structures by the Israeli forces has amounted to 954 structures, resulting in the displacement of 1032 people, including 112 women and 219 children, and affecting a total of 28452 people. 15% of the demolished structures were found in East-Jerusalem and 82% of them were found in Area C of the West Bank.<sup>10</sup> As for the type of demolished structures, the most affected are agricultural 341, inhabited residential structures 193, and livelihood structures 185 structures.

The number of carried out demolitions is highly concerning and represents one of the most acute and damaging IHL violations of the occupying power. For Palestinian women, home demolitions are particularly detrimental. Due to traditional patriarchal structures, the home is most often seen as the women's sphere, and they are often expected to continue caring for the family's practical and emotional needs with or without shelter. Mothers are left to care for their children and heal the trauma incurred by having their homes destroyed. It is also common for displaced families to move in with relatives on the husband's side, which often leads to a decrease of women's decision-making power and agency. Women supported by WCLAC have described that the little authority that they previously had is stripped away as they move in with in-laws.<sup>11</sup> Psychological distress is as well among the consequences of house demolition on women and girls, since they witness the violent intrusions carried out early in the morning or late at night, and/or the arrests of family members to which they can also be a victim of.

As for the types of demolitions, there are three main categories of demolition orders that have been used in the West-Bank and East-Jerusalem, starting with **punitive demolitions** where houses are demolished as retaliation for the actions of people associated with the house. This practice only applies to Palestinians in the occupied territory. This type of demolition adversely affects other members of the household, making it a collective punishment prohibited under international humanitarian law. Furthermore, this punishment by association is usually done without having undergone any judicial process or fair hearing for the individual who has been accused of committing the crime itself or of collaboration with the accused. This jeopardizes the individual's right to a fair trial and equal protection before the law.

Secondly, **administrative demolitions** where houses are demolished for lack of Israeli issued building permits, which are extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain<sup>12</sup>. It also implements a policy that almost completely bans Palestinian construction in the remaining 40% of Area C. Of the 240 villages in Area C, only 27 have master plans that constitute 0.5% of the surface-area of all "C" areas, most of which are originally urban areas. Further, and only 15% of occupied East Jerusalem. Data shows that in 2021 a ration

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition>

<sup>11</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/most-palestinian-plans-build-area-c-not-approved>

of 98% of the citizens went through the process of submitting an application for a building permit for a house or workplace in Area C.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the 1970 Legal and Administrative Matters Law allows Israeli settlers and settler organizations (e.g., Shimon Estate) to claim ownership of single structures or entire neighborhoods, as is the case in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem.

Finally, ***land-clearing operations/military demolitions*** are when houses are demolished by the Israeli military occupation forces during military operations for the purposes of clearing off a piece of land. The law of occupation prohibits destruction and demolition unless necessary for military operations<sup>14</sup>. In Area C, new military orders enable Israeli authorities to circumvent procedures and execute demolitions or confiscation of assets without (or with very short) prior notice. The lack of proper notice limits households' ability to seek legal support and challenge the order<sup>15</sup>. Military demolitions account for the majority of defined demolitions, leaving most affected Palestinians homeless as a result.

In occupied East Jerusalem, an area where demographic domination is the end goal, house and other immovable structures are unceasingly under the threat of demolition. In 2022, 41 structures were demolished resulting in the displacement of 130 people including of which were minors, yet in January 2022 alone, 30 structures were demolished on orders of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Civil Administrative and the MOI<sup>16</sup>.

In cases where demolition is inevitable many Palestinians in East Jerusalem choose to self-demolish. Self-demolition is a phenomenon that has emerged after the enactment of Amendment 116 of the Planning and Building Law (Kaminitz law) in 2017, which inter alia increased the use of financial penalties in cases of administrative construction offenses. In light of the pandemic situation (2020 - 2022), many men have lost their jobs, which forced their wives to sell or give up on their share of inheritance to support the household's finances and/or with the expenses of the demolition.

In the Northern Jordan Valley Area, tent, animal's structures and house demolitions among Bedouin communities have been on the rise, most notably during a worldwide pandemic, which requires a safe shelter with access to water and other sanitary essentials. There are seven military bases in the Northern Jordan Valley, with a total area of 14,395 dunums, in addition to the vital scope of these bases, which are considered military areas completely banned for Palestinians to enter/use. The danger of these bases is represented in the regular military training that they conduct throughout the year between the homes and tents of Palestinians; the occupation forces distribute orders to Palestinian Bedouins to evacuate their homes and tents before starting the maneuvers, in which live ammunition is used. These punitive measures place enormous psychological burdens upon women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by these kinds of collective punishments and are left to bear the weight of these consequences.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/PSR%20case%20studies\\_building%20permits\\_English.pdf](https://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/PSR%20case%20studies_building%20permits_English.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/amnesty-international-report-202021-state-worlds-human-rights-enarru>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>

<sup>16</sup> B'tselem, <https://statistics.btselem.org/en/demolitions/>

House demolitions are usually carried out early in the morning or late at night. This is especially traumatizing for women and children who would be present during the time of the demolition. After the execution of the punitive measures, oftentimes, the occupation forces would usually conduct a number of arrests amongst family members, including children and women. Another key negative impact of these punitive measures is the heavy financial burdens they impose on women and their families.

### *The Blockade against the Gaza Strip Continues*

The Gaza Strip has experienced seven major events in the past 15 years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, six aggressions and an Israeli government-imposed embargo that has severely limited their ability to travel by land, air, and sea. Over 800,000 of the Gaza Strip's two million residents, or 47% of the population, have never seen life outside of the siege.

According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHR), the 11-days of intense Israeli aggression on Gaza between May 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 2021 was the gravest since 2014. In addition to these who have been killed or injured thousands of people were displaced. Homes and important infrastructure were damaged or destroyed, and there was a severe disruption in the delivery of essential services<sup>17</sup>. As a result, in 2022, these military attacks had worsened the trauma and appalling humanitarian conditions that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip already endured. Even more so than the previous year, there is increased displacement, gender-based violence, mental health hazards, exposure to the elements, and loss of livelihoods. Palestinian human rights organizations have stated that the Israeli blockade must be lifted, the internal political division in the Palestinian Authority must end, and international human rights law and humanitarian law must be respected for any sustainable recovery to last. According to the UN Human Rights Experts and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the blockade of the Gaza Strip violates international law since it amounts to "collective punishment" and prohibits residents from realizing their fundamental rights. According to Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, collective punishment is expressly forbidden by international humanitarian law<sup>18</sup>.

As part of the blockade, Israel enforces a permit regime upon the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, as well as restrictive measures on the type of goods and materials that can enter the Gaza Strip including certain medical equipment. Restrictions on the entry of medical supplies necessary for cancer patients and other chronic diseases, such as PET/CT and nuclear medicine scanning, are justified under the pretext of "dual-use". Such term is used in reference to materials that can be used for either civilian or military purposes. A press release issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza in May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 defines that more than 35% of Oncology patients have been on the waiting list for months to leave the Gaza Strip for

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2021/06/d8-rga%20brief-compressed%203.pdf?la=en&vs=851>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/10/year-on-war-gaza-frustrated-slow-reconstruction>

treatment.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, many Gazan patients are forced to seek treatment elsewhere, namely, the West Bank - including East Jerusalem, which requires applying for a travel permit.

The unlawful and complex travel permit regime threatens the well-being/health of thousands of Palestinians, and violates their right to “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”, recognized by International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 12, and articles 2, 6 (a), and 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Israel's extensive travel restrictions on Gaza deprive its more than two million citizens of opportunities to improve their lives. The Israeli government's crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution against millions of Palestinians include the closure, which has wreaked havoc on Gaza's economy and contributed to the division of the Palestinian people. Israel has still effective control on the 1967 occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt) and has responsibilities to ensure and protect Palestinian's human rights as an occupying power, which goes beyond IHL's customary law. As such, Israel is required to uphold the human rights of Gaza-based Palestinians, including their freedom of movement within the Occupied Palestinian Territory and internationally, which includes the ability to enter and from their own country. Israel must also uphold Palestinians' rights, including those to education, employment, and health care, for which freedom of movement is a requirement<sup>20</sup>.

Women suffer disproportionately from the effects of the blockade and war, as these are compounded with patriarchal structures. Women also care for the often-overwhelming burden of caring for children and elderly relatives despite lack of resources. This is not to mention that a rise in gender-based violence (GBV), school dropouts, child and forced marriage, and early high-risk pregnancies have all been directly linked to the unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, food insecurity, electricity blackouts, sanitation disasters, and large-scale casualties that Gazans endure, while shelters and other service providers struggle to meet the needs with shrinking resources.<sup>21</sup>

### *Settlers Violence*

The expansion of settlements and growth of settler population has brought a concurrent increase in settler violence, despite the pandemic and lockdown measures during the past two years. Human Rights experts expressed that: During the first half of 2022, OCHA documented 356 incidents where Israeli settlers caused two Palestinian fatalities, 129 Palestinian injuries, including at least 15 children, and extensive damage to property, including more than 5,400 trees and 357 vehicles. On a monthly average, this is the highest level of incidents and represents a 46% increase compared with 2021.<sup>22</sup>

The culture of impunity both the Israeli settler and the Israeli soldiers enjoy is manifested in the violence they commit against Palestinians residing in the H2 area. Living in the same compound and sometimes in

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.ps/portal/press-release-by-the-ministry-of-health-gaza%F0%9F%87%B5%F0%9F%87%B8-muhammad-abu-salmiya-director-general-of-al-shifa-hospital/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-israels-open-air-prison-15-enarhe>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2021/06/d8-rga%20brief-compressed%203.pdf?la=en&vs=851>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/mid-year-humanitarian-response-dashboard-january-june-2022>

the same building, Palestinians have reported incidents of pepper spray attacks, stealing of private property, stones and garbage throwing, physical and verbal harassment, house invasions as well as attempts of killing by settlers and summary execution by the soldiers. There is very little possibility of recourse to any remedy following violence by settlers or occupation soldiers in H2, as there is no formal government institution willing and able to protect Palestinians. As highlighted by Human Rights Watch, the difficulties women who are victims of crime face in Hebron are exacerbated by the fact the Palestinian police cannot enter H2, and that Palestinians have difficulty reaching the Palestinian police station in H1.

### *Journalist Violations*

Shireen Abu-Akleh, a veteran Palestinian journalist, was assassinated in cold blood on May 11, 2022, by an Israeli occupation force sniper as she was documenting a military operation in the city of Jenin northern West Bank. Since 1997, Abu-Akleh has been a reporter for Al-Jazeera Arabic. During these 25 years, she was often injured and harassed by the armed forces of the occupation, but yet never wavered in her unflinching coverage of Israel's abuses and excessive violence against Palestinians.

The excessive use of force against Palestinian journalists that has gone unpunished is regarded as a violation of their rights to life, liberty, and freedom of speech. The killing of Shireen is a prime example of Israel's consistent disregard to its responsibility to distinguish between civilians and combatants, as required by Rule 1 of the ICRC's database of international customary law<sup>23</sup>, and as a result, gravely violates international humanitarian law. According to Article 79(1) of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention<sup>24</sup> journalists involved in risky professional tasks in armed conflict zones shall be recognized as civilians and shielded from "military operations" and other dangerous actions. The past three years have demonstrated and confirmed Israel's systematic practice of routinely intimidating, physically abusing, and detaining journalists without cause in order to prevent them from witnessing, recording, and reporting on nonviolent protests against human rights crimes.

This violation of IHRL and IHL constitutes a war crime as it denies Shireen her right to life as guaranteed by articles 6 of ICCPR<sup>25</sup> and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)<sup>26</sup>. The occupation military personnel violently attacked unarmed coffin carriers with batons, sound bombs, and rubber bullets, during her funeral. Additionally, raising the Palestinian flag in East Jerusalem sparked ugly and aggressive behavior from the occupation, violating the right of Palestinians to peaceful assembly (as guaranteed by article 21 of the ICCPR<sup>27</sup>) and the expression of their national identity. Several violent arrests were carried out that day, on the pretext of hoisting the Palestinian flag "Chanting

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<sup>23</sup> <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1>

<sup>24</sup> <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Comment.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=CBD4507E8159EBE1C12563CD00436EC4>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights#:~:text=prohibited%20by%20law.-,Article%2021,peaceful%20assembly%20shall%20be%20recognized.>

national/Palestinian slogans," as well as one's bare attendance and participation in the funeral and commemoration march, were further grounds for carrying out arbitrary arrests and physical assaults.

Israeli soldiers have violated journalists 625 times since 2021, yet no one has been punished guilty. Similar to this, accountability was never upheld in any of the 44 previous killings of Palestinian journalists. Additionally, in the year 2020, Deputy Oded Forer of the Yisrael Beiteinu group put forth a draft law that prevents jailing an Israeli soldier who kills a Palestinian while performing their duty; instead, if the killing was against orders, they must serve a six-month required military (labor) term.

Numerous UN experts and diplomats recommended an early and thorough inquiry into the shocking crime against Shireen and emphasized the need to bring the offender accountable and implement the required penalties. In June 2022, the US deemed the investigation on Shireen's murder to be 'inconclusive'<sup>28</sup>, stating that ballistic research was unable to definitively determine whether the shot came from an Israeli gun or a Palestinian one, and that the deadly bullet that killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was likely accidentally fired by an Israeli soldier. This is despite multiple reports, witnesses' claims that there were no Palestinian citizens in the area at the time of the shooting and that Shireen was shot straight in the head, verifying that the bullet wound was directly targeted at her and investigations that concluded the shot came from an Israeli vehicle<sup>29</sup>.

Over time, it has been evident that "Israel" and the internal procedures it uses have an impunity culture. The murder is an example of the continuous apartheid policies and attitude of the Israeli occupation, which continue to condone war crimes and deny journalists the ability to practice their profession while being protected as civilians. The Israeli occupation's attempts to intimidate journalists in order to conceal its routine violations of international humanitarian law and human rights are brought to mind by this murder. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet urges an end to this diminishment of responsibility for Israel's crimes by stating: ***"The culture of impunity must end now"***<sup>30</sup>.

## Digital Rights

In 2022, 7amleh The Arab Center for the Advancement of social media documented 1119 digital rights violations committed by social media companies, various authorities, and other parties against Palestinians and published its 8<sup>th</sup> report "[Hashtag Palestine 2022](https://7amleh.org/storage/Hashtag_Palestine_2022_English.pdf)", which presents a diagnosis to the state of digital freedoms, and outlines the most prominent patterns of digital rights violations. 7amleh, managed to recover around 30% of the deleted Palestinian content from various platforms, which was reported to their documentation tool "Observatory for Documentation of Palestinian Digital Rights Violations" (7or). The report shows that "Meta" company is still the most restricting company in relation to other social media giants in terms of the extent of its moderation of the Palestinian digital space.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.state.gov/on-the-killing-of-shireen-abu-akleh/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/20/world/middleeast/palestian-journalist-killing-shireen.html>

<sup>30</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118272>

<sup>31</sup> [https://7amleh.org/storage/Hashtag\\_Palestine\\_2022\\_English.pdf](https://7amleh.org/storage/Hashtag_Palestine_2022_English.pdf)



7amleh shed light on the most prominent violations related to digital rights at the level of the three authorities (Israeli government, Palestinian Authority and the de facto authority in the Gaza Strip) on the one hand, and the technology companies on the other, especially with regard to the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to privacy, and the right to assembly and organization, among other rights. The Israeli authorities are working to pass the "Facebook Law" bill in the Israeli Knesset, which constitutes an additional threat to the threats facing Palestinian digital rights in the digital space. In this context, the Israeli authorities have arrested 410 Palestinians, over the past year, for their social media content. As for the Palestinian authorities, 7amleh indicates that the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto authority in the Gaza Strip continue to carry out arbitrary detentions and repeated summons of activists and journalists against the backdrop of their digital activity and expression of their political opinions through communication platforms. The center has documented 7 cases of arbitrary detention for posting on social media.

On the level of social media companies, 7amleh referred to the results of the due diligence report published by the "Business for Social Responsibility" network (known as BSR) on the effects of the content management policies of Meta during the May 2021 escalations, which indicated excessive enforcement of content management policies on Palestinian content published in Arabic, compared to the lack of enforcement of content management policies on Israeli content published in Hebrew, which confirmed the long-standing complaints of human rights organizations regarding Meta's bias against the Palestinians.

On the other hand, 7amleh showed the continued violation by the Israeli authorities of the Palestinians' right to privacy and the protection of personal data without any checks or deterrents. Moreover, the report shows the increasing spread of surveillance and espionage techniques around the world, as reports indicate the expansion of the use of the Israeli "Pegasus" software to suppress opposition activists and the press in different countries around the world. The report indicated the absence of a law regulating the right to privacy and the protection of personal data of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, although 69% of the Palestinians supported the necessity of such a law.

## Palestinian Detainees

Palestinians are imprisoned as "security detainees" in Israeli jails and detention facilities, although in reality, they are political prisoners who are frequently detained without being charged or given a fair trial. As of 2022, there are 4,450 Palestinians incarcerated by Israel, including 160 children under the age of 18, and 32 female prisoners, including one female minor. The vast majority of Palestinian prisoners are imprisoned in Israeli prisons inside the Green Line, amounting to acts of forcible transfer from the occupied territory, in violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949). Israel frequently uses imprisonment as a method of political control in line with its intention to establish an institutionalized colonial regime of oppression and dominance, obstructing any chance of ending the occupation<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Haq, "Ongoing Violations of the Rights of Palestinian Prisoners", 17 April 2007, available at: <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/7311.html>



Approximately 2,140 Palestinians have been detained by Israel since January 2022, according to a joint statement from organizations that support inmates. Since March and the beginning of April these arrests have increased significantly, with widespread searches and arrests occurring in Jenin and Jerusalem. After attacking worshippers before the dawn prayer on Friday, April 15, the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque and detained more than 450 Palestinians there in a mass arrest. Israel has imposed over 400 administrative detention orders on Palestinians so far this year, the majority of which are extensions of earlier detention orders. All in all, there are 530 Palestinians without charge or trial under administrative detention, a practice that violates Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and qualifies as a war crime under Article 8 (2)(a)(vi) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It is worth emphasizing that administrative detention is a method used by Israel to imprison Palestinians without charge or trial<sup>3334</sup>.

Around 500 Palestinian administrative detainees began a boycott of Israel's military tribunals on January 1st, 2022, in opposition to the apartheid regime's arbitrary detention of them. This widespread disobedience aims to draw attention to the cruel and humiliating treatment of Palestinians based on "secret information<sup>35</sup>." In March 2022, Israel was urged by the UN Human Rights Committee to "immediately put an end to the pervasive practice of arbitrary arrests and detention, including administrative detention, of Palestinians, in particular minors". It should make sure that all legal and procedural safeguards are provided to Palestinian detainees, including those held in administrative detention, including the right to be informed of the reason for their arrest and detention, access legal counsel, and be brought promptly before a judge, as well as the right to notify a person of their detention, in accordance with article 9 of the CCPR<sup>3637</sup>.

Currently, there are more than 600 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons who are afflicted with a variety of ailments and lack access to quality medical care. Of them, 200 have been identified as having chronic illnesses, including 22 with cancer<sup>38</sup>.

According to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, on Saturday, February 7, 2022, Israeli officials confirmed the death of Saadia Salem Radwan Matar (64), a Palestinian woman from the Ethna community in western Hebron who was being held at the Israeli Damon jail. The Palestinian Prisoner's Club initially claimed that Saadia, the detainee, had fainted and was taken by fellow prisoners right away to the clinic before she eventually passed away there. Saadia, who is the eldest among the female prisoners detained in the Israeli jails, was reported to have attended her hearing on a wheelchair. Moreover, her lawyer had already asked the Israeli prison service to refer her to a doctor after her medical examinations showed that her health condition was getting worse due to high diabetes and blood pressure. The PCHR has

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<sup>33</sup> Articles 9, 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966).

<sup>34</sup> Article 8 (2)(a)(vi), Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: Palestinian administrative detainees complete 100 days of boycotting Israeli courts", 11 April 2022, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/israel-opt-palestinian-administrative-detainees-complete-100-days-of-boycotting-israeli-courts/>

<sup>36</sup> CCPR/C/ISR/CO/5, (30 March 2022) para 35

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/19920.html>

<sup>38</sup> <https://pchrgaza.org/en/medical-neglect-kills-palestinian-woman-detained-in-israeli-prisons/>

expressed its concern that the deliberate medical incompetence that Palestinian prisoners endure in Israeli prisons is what led to Matar's death<sup>39</sup>.

The Hasharon and Damon prisons in Israel which are typically used to hold Palestinian women detainees have been repeatedly found to lack a gender-sensitive services, and as a result, women detainees are denied access to their basic rights and subjected to mistreatment, medical malpractice, solitary confinement, a lack of personal hygiene needs, denial of family visits, and cramped cells<sup>40</sup>. The passing of Matar highlights the general deterioration in the conditions of the more than 4600 Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails as well as the severity of the inhumane actions committed against them, particularly in light of the medical malpractice to which they are subjected and the lack of medical care for hundreds of patients, particularly those with serious and chronic illnesses<sup>41</sup>.

### International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel

The recent Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel report presented to the Human Rights Council in June 2022 found that discrimination against Palestinians and Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territory are the main contributors to the region's ongoing tensions, instability, and conflict. The commission released its 18-page report after reviewing the recommendations made by past commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, as well as by other United Nations organizations and its own hearings. During its two visits to Geneva and one to Jordan, the Commission held discussions with a range of stakeholders, including Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations. This is the first commission of its kind; in that it has a broad mandate not limited in time to investigate IHL and IHRL in both the Palestinian and Israeli territories.

The Commission observed that the Palestinian people's growing animosity is being fueled by impunity. It highlighted a number of variables that contribute to recurrent cycles of violence, including forced relocation, threats of forced displacement, demolitions, settlement construction and growth, settler violence, and the siege of Gaza. It also noted a number of underlying concerns that were at the heart of most proposals, such as Israel's disregard for the rules and customs of war, including those pertaining to belligerent occupation, as well as violations and abuses of individual and collective rights<sup>42</sup>. Commissioner Chris Sidoti added: *"Israel clearly has no intention of ending the occupation. In fact, it has established clear policies to ensure complete permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This includes altering the demography of these territories through the maintenance of a repressive environment for*

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<sup>39</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israel-must-respect-human-rights-palestinian-detainees-israeli-prisons-and-open-investigation-death-saadia-farajallah>

<sup>40</sup> Addameer, Joint statement by prisoners' organizations 2022, 16 April 2022, Available in (ar) at: <https://www.addameer.org/node/4756>

<sup>41</sup> OHCHR, "COVID-19: Israel must release Palestinian prisoners in vulnerable situation, say UN experts", (24, april, 2020): available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/04/covid-19-israel-must-release-palestinian-prisoners-vulnerable-situation-say?LangID=E&NewsID=25822>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/commission-inquiry-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east-jerusalem>

*Palestinians and a favorable environment for Israeli settlers. Israel's policies and actions build Palestinian frustration and lead to a sense of despair. They fuel the cycle of violence and the protraction of conflict."*

The report also emphasized how frequently the Palestinian Authority uses the occupation as an excuse for its own human rights violations and as the primary pretext for not holding legislative and presidential elections. However, the de facto rulers of Gaza have shown scant commitment to upholding human rights and international humanitarian law. The acknowledgement of Israel's human rights abuses and unlawful occupation of Palestine affect Palestinians and their social and political evolution is a well applauded accomplishment as it solidifies the urgent need for the international community's role in putting an end to Israel's human rights violation and war crimes.

By the end of the year 2022, WCLAC submitted a report to the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. The report provided evidence that is relevant to the Commission's investigation concerning Palestinian human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and persons participating in peaceful demonstrations. Specific incidents targeting women human rights defenders, demonstrators, and activists are described. The report highlighted and verified Israeli IHL violations, including the use of violence against Palestinians exercising their freedom of expression, harassment, the detention and arrest of human rights defenders, and the prevailing culture of impunity enjoyed by Israel as the occupying power. This report also documented recent violations by the Palestinian Authority of women's rights to freedom of expression and media freedoms in the public sphere in the State of Palestine.

### Amnesty International Report

On another positive note, Amnesty International report "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity" recognized Israel's oppressive regime as "apartheid," as prohibited under international law. The investigation showed that Israel imposes a system of tyranny and supremacy on Palestinians in all regions under its control, including Israel, the OPT, and against Palestinian refugees, in order to safeguard Jewish Israelis. Amnesty further acknowledged that Israel's inhumane act (basically a serious human rights violation) was carried out in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one Israel over Palestine, with the intention of maintaining that system, which is prohibited by the Rome Statute, the Apartheid Convention, and customary international law as an apartheid crime against humanity. Amnesty demanded that Israel remove its current policies of fragmentation, isolation, discrimination, and deprivation against the Palestinian population in order to put an end to the worldwide wrong and crime of apartheid<sup>43</sup>.

In talks of the ongoing struggle and suffering of the Palestinian people, human rights have long been ignored. Palestinians have fought for the designation of Israel's governance as apartheid after more than 20 years of brutal Israeli brutality. WCLAC therefore applauds the fact that the view that Israel's treatment of Palestinians equates to apartheid has finally gained support on a global scale and continues to urge the international community to join the call for justice on a global scale.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>

### III. Gender-based violence and femicide

#### *Gender-based violence*

For Palestinian women, GBV has long been a top human rights concern. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' (PCBS) 2019 poll, 29% of ever-married Palestinian women reported having experienced GBV in some way in the year before to the survey. Moreover, in 2021, the Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs estimated that GBV has increased by 300 per cent due the pandemic<sup>44</sup>. Since the pandemic, WCLAC has published considerable coverage on the rise in GBV and has provided assistance to hundreds of women.

The crisis's repercussions on society have evolved and changed as time has gone on. This indicates that while the risk variables mentioned above have changed marginally, the elevated risk of GBV has not changed. For instance, while the initial shock and anxiety caused by COVID-19, which exacerbated tension within families, may have subsided, the economic hardship and unemployment brought on by worldwide inflation and as a result of the occupation have actually gotten worse over time.

Lockdowns and school closings have stopped, but it seems that more rigid gender norms and a rise in women's unpaid labor have persisted. Because women now operate in a different power dynamic, have less negotiating leverage, and are more likely to experience psychological and physical abuse, these more significant cultural changes continue to have an effect on the likelihood of GBV.

In 2022, it is clear that the COVID-19 aftermath, the worldwide inflation brought on by the war in Ukraine, and the aftershocks of the Gaza War have given birth to longer-lasting consequences on family relations and the lives of women. Although they continue to have a major negative influence on women's safety and wellbeing, there is a significant risk that these effects will become harder to discern with time. Therefore, it is crucial that WCLAC and other women's rights organizations continue to draw attention to the increased difficulties that Palestinian women continue to face in terms of their difficult economic situation, high unemployment rates, and entrenched gender roles—all of which heighten the already high risk of GBV.

#### *Femicide*

Femicide, which involves the intentional and gender-based murder of women, is the most extreme and horrible form of gender-based violence (GBV) and a violation of women's human rights<sup>45</sup>. There have been 29 incidents of femicide documented by WCLAC during the year 2022 (21 in the West Bank and 8 in Gaza Strip). WCLAC is currently in process of developing an analytic report of the femicide cases for the years 2021 and 2022 and will be produced and published during the first quarter of 2023.

The current judicial system often makes it more difficult for women who are vulnerable to femicide to seek assistance and justice, failing to appropriately address the problem of femicide. The application of

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<sup>44</sup> UNSCO (2021a).

<sup>45</sup> WHO, "Understanding and addressing violence against women", available at:  
[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.38\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO_RHR_12.38_eng.pdf)

the law is murky and opaque due to overlapping laws, outdated and patriarchal penal codes, and other factors. Having said that, it is important to note that the Family Protection Bill has undergone certain adjustments in the beginning of 2022, which had not happened since 2016. There are still some gaps, nevertheless, and they fall short of WCLAC's standards. Ergo, WCLAC submitted a counter-report identifying the flaws in the law's revisions and further requests urging the Palestinian authorities to use the law to reduce domestic abuse.

Since Palestine's accession to International Conventions and Treaties; especially CEDAW the Palestinian Authority did not do much to comply with provisions of these conventions. There had been limited progress on measures taken to prevent or reduce the number of femicide cases in Palestine. In addition, there is a predominance of discriminatory and outdated laws and legislation inherited from previous rules over the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) such as the current Penal Law, Personal Status Law on one hand, and the absence of a Family Protection Bill and a comprehensive protection system for victims of GBV and femicide on the other hand.

### Family Protection Bill

The Family Protection Bill went through different phases of review and stagnation, which reflects the limited political will to enact this law. After being sent to the Palestinian President under the previous government, the Bill was sent to the Shtayye's government for further review. The Minister of Social Development formulated a committee represented by Fatwa and Legislation Bureau, Ministry of Women Affairs, Prosecution Office, High Judicial Council and Palestinian Police to review the Bill taking into account the feedback of the President's legal advisor. The Committee met with civil society organization on February 2020 to present the modification made on the Bill based on recommendations and comments provided by CSOs on the last draft. Accordingly, the draft Bill was issued end of 2021. A review of this draft shows that that some changes were made on this draft, which do not comply with international conventions and the concluding remarks of CEDAW Committee to Palestinian government after the official review of the State report in 2018. It was noticed that the definition of discrimination, which was one of the concluding remarks of CEDAW Committee and was part of Article (1) of the previous draft was deleted. Civil society organizations expressed their rejection and criticism through an official letter sent to the Palestinian Cabinet requesting it to reconsider deletion the definition of discrimination in the Family Protection Bill. The official letter also requested the Palestinian Cabinet to reconsider deletion of Article (44) on the penalty of discrimination, which is considered one essential articles in the previous draft. WCLAC emphasis that violence against women is a form of discrimination and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which is considered a violation of women's human rights. WCLAC and women organization also request a clear definition of discrimination in line with CEDAW while explicitly stating that custom, tradition, or religious considerations may not be invoked to justify violence against women. As for the discrimination definition, WCLAC and women organizations requested that it clearly defines that violence is a form of violence, which represents the unequal relations between men and women within the Palestinian society. The definition should also be in-line with international conventions; especially CEDAW. It is worth noting that CEDAW Committee concluding remarks requested Palestinian government to adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women covering all prohibited grounds of discrimination and encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres.

The Rapporteur responsible of following-up concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reflected their feedback in March 2021 on the State initial and follow-up CEDAW report. The Committee emphasized their dissatisfaction with progress made on responding to the concluding remarks. In specific, the Government did not respond to the Committee concluding remark regarding the adoption without delay of a comprehensive definition of **definition of discrimination against women covering all prohibited grounds of discrimination and encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres**. The Committee also noted that the draft decree-law concerning protection of the family from violence considered by the previous Government was referred by the Cabinet to the new Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Justice in 2019, for reconsideration, consultation and awareness-raising, before being transmitted to a technical committee composed of the aforementioned ministries, other organs of the executive, representatives of the judiciary and representatives of civil society, to prepare a second version of the draft law.

### Encounter and smear Campaigns against Human Rights Organizations and Human Rights Defenders

Over the last two years, Palestinian women and feminist organizations have been subjected to structured and planned smear campaigns by various political parties that claim to be working to preserve social values and religious discourse. These claims are erroneous but are an attempt to claim the moral ground and discredit the reputation and profile of feminist organizations within the Palestinian community.

In 2022, the counter social media campaign against the passage of the Family Protection Bill has been continued, intensifying the hate speech against feminist organizations calling for the adoption of the Law, including WCLAC. Defamation also targeted individual women human rights defenders, including WCLAC's General Director Randa Siniora, through naming and shaming her activism and role to influence the adoption of the Law. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, a meeting was organized by AL Muntada held with Palestinian General Attorney at the Prosecution Office aimed at shedding light and discussing the impact of this defamation campaign against feminist human rights activists, which might threaten their lives. WCLAC, Al-Muntada, Al Haq and the Independent Commission for Human Rights also requested the Prosecution Office to provide protection to women who were targets and to take legal measures against these groups who lead this counter campaign.

The Women's Studies Center (WSC) is one organization that has come under attack. It is a non-governmental, feminist, human rights organization that works to develop and promote a progressive feminist discourse based on values of social justice and gender equality, and respect for human rights in accordance with international laws and conventions. WSC focuses its intervention on education and over the past five years, has worked on two programs in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Education: the first program focuses on combating child marriage and raising awareness of the impact of early marriage on girls; the second program is an educational program aimed at enabling children and adolescents to avoid and deal with sexual harassment.

These two programs were developed based on the results of studies conducted by the WSC on the health, sexual, psychological, and social risks of child marriage. Accordingly, the Center developed training manuals and guidelines for social counselors in schools to reference in their work with students and parents to educate them about the risks of early marriage. These manuals are for the social counselors at schools and are not a learning material for students. The training manual was published jointly by WSC



and the Ministry of Education. However, WSC is currently facing a campaign of incitement against its work. WSC Director Sama Awaida, who participated in making the manual, stated, *"We are accused of discouraging early marriage for girls and encouraging students to turn to homosexuality and gender transition. However, none of these topics are mentioned in the manual."*

A digital campaign was conducted on social media against WSC's school programs amid claims that WSC encourages immoral ideas to destroy society through foreign-funded programs and agenda. A series of protests against WSC were organized by structured groups in front of the Ministry of Education's offices to condemn the manuals and demand that all WSC programs in schools be halted. This campaign was also aired in mosques during Friday prayer speeches to gather more supporters. Instead of upholding its responsibilities to protect human rights organizations and women human rights defenders, the Ministry of Education stopped all WSC programs in schools. This stance by the Ministry reveals the complicity of the Palestinian Authority against human rights defenders. Awaida said, *"I am sure that the supporters of the counter campaign against us have not reviewed the manual and its components but unfortunately, they blindly follow the opponents without transparency or accountability. We have filed a complaint with the Cybercrime Prosecution and the Public Prosecutor, and we are awaiting their action."*

### Early Marriage Still Prevailing

Personal Status Laws (PSL) within Palestinian's jurisdiction reinforce the principles of inequality and discrimination against women. Palestine lacks a unified, modern and just Palestinian legislative system for personal status issues that ensures equal relations between spouses within the marriage institution, which further exacerbates disparities and gender inequalities within the family.

The first article of Decree-Law No. 21 of 2019 which was issued by a Presidential Decree, stipulates that the marriage eligibility requires that the parties to the contract be sane, and adults (each of whom is eighteen years of age). However, according to paragraph (1), the competent court may, in special cases if the marriage is a necessity dictated by the interests of both parties, authorize the marriage of a person who has not completed eighteen solar years of age. This is done with the approval of the Palestine Chief Judge of the Sharia Court or the religious authorities of other Christian sects. These exceptions were left roughly, as it has not been determined what the legislator intended in having this exception. What is happening now on the ground is that an exception request is submitted to the Chief Justice to approve the marriage contract, and upon approval, the contract is made for those under the age of eighteen.

Another method used, to violate the legal text for the sake of marriage under the legal age, a marriage contract is organized by a person who could be a marriage officer or any person without directly appearing in the contract. The contract and marriage are performed. In case of pregnancy, the marriage contract is taken to the court judge in the presence of a personal status attorney. In one or two sessions, the marriage contract can be approved with the payment of symbolic fines by all those who participated in writing the contract, except for the authorized officer or the person who wrote the contract, as he did so without appearing directly.

It is the responsibility of the legislative and competent authorities to legislate the law to preserve and limit the phenomenon of child marriage in the Palestinian society. It is their responsibility not to leave exceptions and to strictly specify and monitor who performs a marriage contract for under-aged persons. Otherwise, the matter remains open to more violators and indifferent to the application of the law.

## Progress towards Outcomes & Achievements

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***The year 2022 is the second year of implementing WCLAC's five-year strategic plan, "Learning, Sharing Knowledge, Mobilizing and Empowering Palestinian Women Through Innovation to Create Change". This year WCLAC and other organisations around the world are adapting with the impact of COVID-19 Palestinian on women***

***Strategic goal 1: Contribute to the protection and empowerment of women suffering discrimination and violence***

**Provision of quality Protection Legal & Social Services and Emergency protection.**

As part of WCLAC's strategic direction to contribute to the protection and empowerment of women suffering discrimination and violence, the Centre maintained its work towards providing social and legal counseling and protection services to women victims of violence.

For the two years, a total of 2468 women victims of GBV were supported to access their social and legal rights in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Analysis shows that 42.8% of the women beneficiaries live in the city, yet 27.5% of these live in area C. Most of the legal cases that WCLAC dealt with revolved around divorce (23.25% of the cases), custody (13.5% of the cases) and alimony (53.5% of the cases). The high rate of cases was related to alimony reflects the poverty and living conditions of these women as they depend on the sum of money as a source of living/income as they lack other financial resources due to early marriage, or not completing their studies. Analysis of cases of women that approached WCLAC for social and legal counselling shows that 58.4% of the women beneficiaries didn't complete their education, 63% are housewives, 8% are unemployed and 4% work irregularly. As for the social status of women, 56.5% of the women left the marital house, 6.5% were abandoned, and 9.75% of them were married at an early age, less than 18 years old. WCLAC's human rights feminist approach to support women's access to justice is conditioned with examining all options available to obtain legal settlement, either through court representation or mediation.

WCLAC helped women to access their legal rights through court representation, 972 legal verdicts were in favor them through WCLAC lawyers and a total of 303 cases were through out-of-court settlements and mediation facilitated by WCLAC's team of lawyers and social workers. Further, WCLAC feminist approach ensures investing comprehensive and collective efforts to empower women beyond interventions timeframe to support women in claiming and protecting their own rights. While litigating on behalf of women before the Shari'a and Ecclesiastical Courts WCLAC social workers provide psychosocial support through a well-defined intervention plan designed with women themselves. A total of 757 women received long-term and social counselling through individual sessions as well as providing them with awareness raising material on alimony, custody, and divorce rights.



Additionally, taking into consideration mobility and accessibility issues, especially for women living in remote areas, WCLAC provided 1523 consultation through the free help-line and e-counselling. A total of 489 women have received social and legal counselling through the help-line and phone, which provided these women with advice on where to access their rights. Increased number of women seeking advice through the helpline can be attributed to the awareness raising messages WCLAC disseminated through social media and other media outlets. In addition, after the COVID-19 pandemic, most women found the helpline an easy, discreet and accessible tool to seek social and legal advice instead of an in-person meeting.

Women whose lives are under threat require emergency interventions to protect them. Through WCLAC's emergency shelter, which is the only civil society led shelter in Palestine, 67 women between the age of 16-64 years old received sheltering protection after being referred through the National Referral System. Analysis of these cases show that a ratio of 30% of them were forced into marriage, 50.5% were married and 29.5% were single, 67% did not complete school 27% were under 20 years old and 55.5% were under 35 years old. Nevertheless, the nature of the cases and intervention plans were very difficult, since it is surrounded by many challenges and risks. During the last two years a total of 50 women managed to safely return to their homes. WCLAC ensured through comprehensive coordination with social affairs units in different governorates that these women benefit from better conditions within their families, and will be protected from violence, in tandem with gaining more dignity and respect.

Remote and marginalized areas are extremely underserved with social and legal services. Accessibility and knowledge about these services are rarely available for women, thus they suffer from dire need for services and awareness to increase their access to their rights. Through building the capacity of grassroots organizations on providing social and legal counseling to women, as well as awareness raising, such women have a window of opportunity to access services in their own communities or nearby ones. Since 2005 WCLAC has partnered with grassroots organizations in marginalized communities and remote areas of the West Bank in order to improve their capacity to provide services to women victims of GBV. This partnership also aimed to support these CBOS to defend Palestinian women's rights and to raise local awareness of the services available to them, should they require legal assistance or social counselling. Since then, WCLAC also has institutionalized its partnerships with three grassroots women's organizations in underserved and marginalized communities in the West Bank. WCLAC continued providing ongoing support and supervision to ensure delivering quality legal and social services to women victims of GBV, while at the same time building their organizational capacity and local linkages to promote women's rights in their communities.

For the past two years, the four partner CBOs of Tubas Charitable Society, Al-Najdeh, Jericho Women Charitable Society (JWCS) and, Nahdet Bent Al Reef Charitable Society (NBRCS) in southern Hebron provided social and legal counselling to **483 women** victims of GBV. The majority of the cases are women being deprived of rights either from the family or the husband especially dowry, alimony, whilst the remainder cover custody, divorce, house rental and physical violence.

As for awareness raising sessions, partner women CBOs conducted a total of 107 awareness raising sessions in marginalized areas to 1,045 participants from the mainly housewives and volunteers (218 men). The sessions focused on cases related to domestic violence, the role of law in protecting women, the National Referral System, the Personal Status Law with specific focus on marriage contract, alimony cases, the psychological impact of divorce, conditions of marriage and divorce rights.

WCLAC established a new protection Network in Nablus, and continued to develop the capacities of service providers' members of the other five local protection networks (Tubas, Hebron, Jericho, Tulkarem, Qalqiliya) formed from representatives of Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, The Family Protection Unit at the Police, Shari's High Judicial Council, and representatives from civil society service providers. The protection networks implemented eight initiatives, and WCLAC built their capacities of 49 members on "human rights values and principles in dealing with women victims of violence".

## ***Strategic goal 2: Promote women's rights to access justice and eliminate discriminatory policies against them***

### **Development of Policies & Procedures to eliminate Discrimination against Women**

WCLAC continued its active participation in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) sessions by making use of its ECOSOC consultative status. For the past two years, within the framework of 25th anniversary of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its adaptation by the State of Palestine, WCLAC and MIFTAH have developed a **national-level review assessment report for implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the Palestinian state**. It presented as additional information on the situation in Palestine regarding compliance with and enforcement of the practice of women's rights, their empowerment and achievement of gender equality. WCLAC used this report as an advocacy tool during the events related to Beijing+25 Declaration and Platform of Action. Starting from the virtual convention of the 65th session of the Commission of the Status of Women in March 2021

WCLAC participated in numerous sessions in the UN, such as the 49<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Human rights Council's sessions, where it has submitted a parallel report of Israel's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR review. Following our submission of the [ICCPR parallel report](#) WCLAC virtually participated in the informal briefing to the Human Rights Committee and during the formal state party review. WCLAC delivered an oral intervention on issues highlighted in the report, especially the repercussions of the renewed family reunification law on women and Palestinian families in Jerusalem. WCLAC delivered a joint oral intervention on item 3 (*Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development*).

WCLAC submitted a joint submission with seven human rights organizations for 4th Cycle of Israel's Universal Periodic Report (UPR). The UPR addresses Israel's discriminatory policies and practices from a gender perspective of the years 2018 and 2022. The submission examines the following themes that have an immense impact on women's lives in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT); the impact of Citizenship

and Entry into Israel Law on women in occupied East Jerusalem; the pillage of Palestinian natural recourse for the benefit of settler colonialism, including illegal allocation of water resources, and the repercussions of environmental violations all over the OPT—including the Gaza Strip on women; lastly, the impact of settler violence and Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) violence on women in H2 Area, particularly in Hebron.

WCLAC participated in the CSW 66<sup>th</sup> platform on Climate change. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, WCLAC delivered a pre-recorded oral statement on the Climate change and its impact on women under occupation within the framework of the Israeli apartheid regime. WCLAC submitted and delivered the statement on behalf of the Palestinian Civil Coalition to UN Resolution 1325, The main points addressed in the statement tackled the impact of Israel's environmental violations on Palestinian people especially on women and girls. In the West Bank, Israel intentionally destructs Palestinian agricultural lands by using them as a dumping ground for military, industrial, nuclear and sewage waste, which causes serious pollution of air, soil and water, and exposes women and children to many diseases and health risks.

For the past two years, WCLAC submitted two follow up reports for the special rapporteur on violence against women on Femicide. The first one was submitted jointly in April 2021 with the Palestinian NGO Forum to Combat Violence Against Women (Al-Muntada). The report covered the period from 2016-2020, addressing the lack of progress in the reduction of the rate of Femicide crimes in Palestine due to the predominance of discriminatory and outdated laws and legislation inherited from previous rules over the oPt, and due to the conflicting legal systems in the West Bank and Gaza which negatively impact the lives of all Palestinians especially women and girls' victims of GBV and femicide. The second one was on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022, WCLAC submitted a follow-up report to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women following her call for updated input on femicide as a contribution to the upcoming thematic report on violence against indigenous women and girls.

Finally, WCLAC produced an urgent appeal regarding the assassination of Al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu-Akleh, and the heightened and unlawful attack on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly by the Israeli occupation authorities. It highlighted the potential threat of diminished presence of Palestinian women journalists on the field, and consequently their political participation as human rights defenders. It also addressed the excessive use of force by the occupation's military and police forces, especially in peacefully assemblies, protests, or simply for raising a flag. Although it was not submitted to the relevant special rapporteurs, it was circulated internally and with other Palestinian CSOs

WCLAC also submitted a parallel report to the Initial report submitted by the State of Palestine in accordance with article (19) of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). While submitting this report WCLAC affirmed that Palestine's legal commitment to the CAT does not absolve Israel, the occupying power, of its responsibilities towards the 1967 occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Israel, as the occupying power, has effective control over the OPT and therefore, human rights treaties and conventions are legally binding on all persons under its jurisdiction, including those in the OPT. The report emphasized that "domestic violence therefore always

amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and very often to physical or psychological torture.” As such women have major characteristics that expose them to different forms of violence and ill treatment; especially patriarchal norms, gaps in the national laws and limited political will to comply with international conventions and treaties.

WCLAC submitted its report to The 85<sup>th</sup> Pre-Sessional Working Group of the CEDAW Committee on the State of Palestine. The report emphasized the importance of adopting the Family Protection Bill and asked the Committee in specific to ask the Palestinian government to **“Expedite enactment of the Family Protection Bill based on the five due diligence principles outlined in customary international law. To include a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women, which includes discrimination based on gender and disability, and impose deterrent penalties against all forms of such discrimination.”** As such CEDAW Committee included in its list of issues a recommendation to the Palestinian government on the Family Protection Bill.

### ***Strategic goal 3: Increased social responsibility of the Palestinian community towards women rights and elimination of discrimination against them***

In 2022, WCLAC developed a [study](#) (in Arabic) on sexual harassment in the workplace which aimed to shed light on the impact of sexual harassment on women’s social, economic and psychological aspect. Sexual harassment within the workplace is one of the most important manifestations of discrimination and violence forms against them, and one of the most important obstacles impeding their equality. It shed light on the economic, social and psychological effects and repercussions on women in particular and the society at large, as well as impact on the development and progress of society. It also reviewed the existing legal reality around this concept and how it is addressed in international and humanitarian treaties and charters, or in the regulations and laws in force in Palestine, in general, and in workplaces in particular.

WCLAC established **thematic Hubs**, which is considered a new strategic component of social mobilization. The main aim of establishing these hubs is to mobilize community members and influence them to act as alliance and active agents of in their communities.

WCLAC believes in enhancing social **mobilization in the Palestinian community**, that meaningful change in favor of women’s rights begins at the grassroots level. For this reason, WCLAC works with volunteer groups to create agents of change who would advocate for legal and policy reform and to contribute to raising the awareness of their local communities on women’s rights. Volunteer mobilization also empowers women (as well as men who support women’s rights) with skills to develop their capacities, self-esteem, social status and voice in the public sphere. WCLAC developed a capacity building program to equip the 38 young male and female volunteer with skills and knowledge on women’s rights. They are then provided with coaching to design and carry out local initiatives in their local communities to promote women’s rights.

Moreover, WCLAC continued empowering women through engaging them in women activists' groups from Jerusalem, Bethlehem Tulkarem and Tubas. Through capacity building and coaching of these women activists they were able to transfer their knowledge to other women in their local communities. As a result, these 64 women agents of change managed to raise the awareness of 987 women and 15 men in 22 local communities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These awareness sessions focused on gender-based violence, electronic blackmail, early marriage, and rights related to inheritance. This approach did not only empower women as agent of change but also created focal points and resource persons who would provide information to women victims of GBV about existing services that would prevent and protect them from violence.

WCLAC aimed at building partnerships with youth CBOs to mobilize youth; especially young men to engage in promoting and advocating for women's rights, which ultimately create agent of change in local communities. WCLAC built partnership two local youth CBO in the governorates of Bethlehem and Hebron to create social catalysts of change to promote women's rights.

Finally, WCLAC trained 151 (19 males and 136 females) Sharia lawyers in Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem between the age group of 22-26 years as part of its capacity building programs for Shari'a lawyer trainees.

***Strategic goal 4: Develop institutional and human capacity in order to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of WCLAC***

WCLAC developed three new policies last year related to Child Safeguarding Policy, Anti-Corruption Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy were finalized and approved by WCLAC Board of Directors (September 2021). The Child Safeguarding Policy aims to provide guidelines to WCLAC and its employees with the aim to sustain a safe environment for the children they encounter during the activities and protect them from any harm. The Anti-Corruption policy aims to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, the policy provides guidelines to WCLAC's employees for their daily operations, providing the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any corrupt actions or practices. And finally, the Sexual Harassment policy aims to provide guidelines to WCLAC's employees with the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any harassment actions, discrimination as well as sexual exploitation and abuse of authority. WCLAC is committed to provide a safe environment for all employees free from discrimination on any ground and from harassment at work including sexual harassment. It should be noted that these three policies were activated in the beginning of 2022.

During 2021 WCLAC also finalized the workload review of all its staff to ensure that their time and allocation on project are done in a comprehensive manner. This was followed by a salary scale review, which was done after conducting a market survey with similar organizations to define whether WCLAC's salaries are in line with the market. Accordingly, the salary scale was developed and approved by the Board of Directors. Currently, all staff members are placed on the new salary scale.

As for the complaint mechanism with external complaints it was finalized and presented to the Board of Directors. There were some comments from the Board of Directors (BOD), which will be reviewed and submitted for final review and approval. Regarding the Human Resources Manual, the BOD suggested to postpone it till WCLAC finalizes the job descriptions and staff evaluation forms. In 2022 WCLAC finalized the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are based on the job descriptions of the employees and related tasks. These KPIs were used during the annual staff evaluation. This facilitated the evaluation process and created interactive discussion between the employee and direct supervisor. Positive feedback are received from the staff on this tool of evaluation.

## Challenges

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### *Limited Political Will to Adhere to International Conventions*

Despite of the accession to a large number of International Conventions and Treaties; especially CEDAW without reservations, the Palestinian State could not concrete measures to adhere to them. CEDAW Committee has requested the Palestinian government to adopt laws that aim at promoting gender equality and would protect women from different forms of violence, one of which is the Family Protection Laws.

The adoption of a Family Protection Bill will contribute to the prevention and protection of women from GBV. Palestinian women's organizations provided their input on several drafts and developed several advocacy campaigns to influence the adoption of the Family Protection Bill. WCLAC has joint efforts with Al Muntada for Combating Violence against Women through advocacy campaigns and submitting shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee calling for the adoption of the Bill. This was combined with awareness-raising sessions and messages that were disseminated through conventional and social media as well as billboards that were installed in different governorates. Through these messages, WCLAC also confronted the counter campaigns led by the conservative groups and at the same time influenced policy and decision-makers

The lack of political will to adopt the Bill will further exacerbate violence against women; especially in the domestic sphere. It will also give more leverage to the conservative groups within the society to maintain their influence on both the government itself and local communities.

### *Smear Campaigns against Palestinian feminists and women human rights defenders*

The leverage of conservative groups with Palestinian society is still prevailing. The smear campaigns against feminists and women human rights defenders continued and put a number of them at risk. Social has been used as a platform by these conservative groups to disseminate out of context messages to that would defame these women human rights defenders and put them at risk. Individual feminists have been directly

targeted through threats, which put their life at risk. WCLAC and Al Muntada to Combat VAW registered a case at the prosecution office and met the Public Prosecutor, nonetheless, no measure was taken either to protect these women or to take affirmative measure against these groups.

### ***Israeli Occupation Policies and Political Instability***

The occupation policies continue to be a multilateral challenge for WCLAC, not only due to political instability but also because we have come to understand that increased violence from the occupation leads to more violence endured by women within the general society and the household as well, which is shown in WCLAC's documented voices. The violence of the occupation disproportionately affects women, both directly and indirectly especially when we talk about residency revocation, minors' house arrest and house demolitions. As the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women highlights in her report on Israel, "patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched in society and petrified and tolerated in the context of conflict and occupation constituting [the] root causes of GBV against women." Recognizing the gendered nature of the occupation, and its direct effect of legitimizing and perpetuating GBV, she makes a clear call for Israel to end "the occupation and conflict and to promptly address its gendered impact in line with its obligations under human rights and humanitarian law principles." This is further exacerbated by the continued internal political divide which works against the interests of the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and increases sufferings of women, especially victims of gender-based violence.

The unstable political situation and split between West Bank and Gaza has adversely affected WCLAC's efforts to influence policy and decision-making process to promote women's rights. The dysfunctional status of the Palestinian Legislative Council stopped enactment of new laws and provided power for the President to issue these laws through Presidential decrees. This could not support WCLAC to pursue its mission on influencing policy and decision-making process.

### ***Shrinking Space for Human Rights and Civil Society Organisations***

Israel's "counter-terrorism" law is used to restrict and shrink civic space on Palestinian human rights organizations. Last year Israel designated six Palestinian organizations as "terrorist" organizations. This means that directors, employees and volunteers of these organizations are at risk of prosecution for offences that carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison for membership of an organization.<sup>46</sup> This attempt to delegitimize the six organizations may have a larger-scale effect on Palestinian Human Rights Defenders. Other human rights organizations that focus on promoting human rights and exposing Israeli violations to Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law will remain at risk. Israel attempts to intimidate Palestinian Human Rights organization might also affect the donor community, which might review its funding policies to civil society organization by imposing conditions that will not be accepted or



justified. The repercussion of this situation will affect WCLAC as a feminist human rights organization either through its work of exposing Israeli violations or the conditional funding.

Shrinking spaces at the local level is also affecting WCLAC's activities due the Palestinian Authority measures imposed through enactment of the cybercrime law. Any advocacy or influencing messages are under surveillance, which increases pressure on WCLAC's plans of holding duty bearers accountable to human rights. Also, the smooth passage of funds between organisations is affected, due to Israeli policies that constrain the movement of funds to bank accounts of Palestinian NGO's in occupied East Jerusalem. Many NGO and International NGO bank accounts in Jerusalem were closed down completely. These impediments persist also due to new measures adopted by the Palestinian Ministry of Interior, which further complicates the transaction process from organisations in areas under the Palestinian Authority control and those in East Jerusalem. Transactions to East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank are being treated as international transfers, causing delays and extensive bureaucratic measures. WCLAC is addressing these issues in cooperation with the Palestinian NGO network, to overcome the complications imposed by these restrictions.

## Risks Assessment and Mitigating Measures

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WCLAC risk and mitigation plan to prevent and respond to any emerging risks is reviewed regularly to avoid and adverse consequences. The Year 2022 marked the emergence of some risks that might directly and indirectly affect our work. Israeli ongoing measures of targeting human rights organizations is still persistent and might affect the work of different women human rights organizations. WCLAC realizes the repercussions of the designation of six Palestinian human rights organizations as “terrorist” organizations, thus we remain determined to invest collective effort to present evidence-based data to different duty bearers to expose Israel violations to human rights. WCLAC programs and interventions focus on the engagement in national, regional and international coalitions and events to present its evidence-based reports that would further exert pressure on Israel to comply with International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law.

Political instability remains one of the risks that play a major role in increasing gender-based violence. The recent Israeli “citizenship and entry law” will further increase the suffering of Jerusalemite women whose spouses hold West Bank ID and vice versa. Women will be imposed to endure violence, discrimination, inaccessibly to their social, economic, educational and personal status rights. Jerusalemite women will be also at risk of losing their residency if they choose to live with their spouses and children in the West Bank.



And West Bank women will not be able to obtain a permit and residency to live with their children and spouses in Jerusalem. This is just a fraction of women's suffering due to these Israeli measures. WCLAC paid attention to this situation through working directly with women victims of GBV and affected by this situation through providing direct services. This is combined with referring these women to our partners at the Jerusalem Legal Aid Centre to provide advice and support related to family reunifications.

Political instability also leads to increase of settlers' violence Palestinians; especially in areas adjacent to Israeli settlements. This is combined with mobility restrictions through the checkpoint regime. WCLAC realizes that impact of such aggression and mobility restriction on women are paramount. These women live in a patriarchal society, which increases its dominance on women through imposing certain rules to "protect" women. Thus, women in need for social and legal services will be victimized both from the patriarchal society and the Israeli measures. Therefore, WCLAC's free helpline provides some refuge for these women through providing them with social and legal advice without the need to physically access our offices.

WCLAC also documents cases Israeli violations in these areas from women themselves to define impact of human rights and IHL violations on their lives. These testimonies are then analyzed and submitted to different UN machinery. WCLAC also provided briefings and information to the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. This is combined with facilitating the Commission's work through facilitating their virtual meetings with women affected by Israeli military measures to provide their testimonies. This contributes to providing evidence on the gendered impact of Israel occupation that would affect the nature of the report to be issued by the COI to make more gender sensitive.

WCLAC also carried out international advocacy campaigns to present evidence-based data on the gendered impact of the Israeli occupation. WCLAC also realized the importance providing a venue for women themselves to present their own stories and talk on their behalf on the impact of Israeli violations of IHL on their lives. As such, WCLAC accompanied a woman activist from the H2 Area in Hebron during the advocacy trip to Brussels and Copenhagen. After being coached on how to present its story as a right holder, this woman presented the impact of settlers' violence on her life and her family to members of the EU Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, politicians and solidarity groups.

The indefinite postponement of the Legislative and Presidential elections hampered the democratic process and the process of reviewing and adopting progressive laws. This contributed to maintaining the de facto situation of resorting to existing Jordanian and Egyptian laws; especially the Penal Code and Family Status Law. This also hampered the adoption of the Family Protection Bill, which has been under reviews for the last 17 years. WCLAC submitted a report to CEDAW Committees for the list of issues emphasizing the limited progress made on the government's adherence to CEDAW Convention. The reports requested the Committee to address the adoption of the Family Protection Bill, the exceptions made on raising the age of marriage and others. The List of Issues provided by CEDAW Committee to the Palestinian Government included a large number of issues highlighted in our report.

## WCLAC's Interrelated Issues

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The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) is an independent Palestinian, non-profit, non-governmental organization that seeks to develop a democratic Palestinian society based on the principles of gender equality and social justice. Based on its feminist vision fostering equality and social justice, WCLAC doesn't only play prominent role in addressing gender-based violence in Palestinian society it also contributes to addressing:

### *Human Rights Issues*

Protecting women's rights includes, inter alia, guaranteeing their access to service provisions such as welfare, legal aid, legal protection, health care, and more. In the context of the OPT, this also includes defending Palestinian women against the patriarchal systems and practices embedded in Palestinian society. Further, in the context of the Israeli military occupation under which Palestinian women suffer the double-edged discrimination of ethno-religious identity and gender, women are the most disadvantaged group and therefore the most susceptible to human rights violations. In this context, our work includes documenting eye witness testimonies from women who have been subjected to violence and violations of their rights by the Israeli authorities. Additionally, WCLAC mobilizing community members; especially men to create agent of change would create more allies who can should the responsibility of promoting and advocating for women and human rights. WCLAC also realizes that through its membership in national, regional and international coalitions it can disseminate its values and principles that are based on human rights principles to further promote women and human rights at all levels.

### *Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment*

WCLAC adopts a zero tolerance to sexual harassment through the adoption of a specific policy, which was adopted by the Board of Directors. The sexual harassment policy provides guidelines to all of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling employees the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any Harassment actions, discrimination as well as sexual exploitation and abuse of authority. WCLAC is committed to provide a safe environment for all employees free from discrimination on any ground and from harassment at work including sexual harassment.

### *Child Safeguarding*

WCLAC adopted a child safeguarding policy that was adopted by the Board of Directors. This policy provides guidelines to the Center and its employees with the aim to sustain a safe environment for the children they encounter during the Center's activities and protect them from any harm. The Center is committed to

protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm and to ensure compliance with all articles of the Palestinian Children Law. Through this policy WCLAC emphasizes its commitment to protect children from violence through supporting, empowering, and raising awareness of important psychological, social, legal and economic issues. Therefore, establishing a child protection policy is essential since the Center works with women who may have children.

### *Protection of Environment*

WCLAC doesn't have a specific policy related to the protection of environment, however WCLAC ensures environmental friendly interventions. For example, WCLAC uses MIS to record clients' data to minimize as much as possible the use of paper files, most of the time we use recycled paper, the usage of glass cups instead of plastic cups in the organization's offices in addition to the use of emails for correspondence to ensure our concern regarding the protection of environment.

### *Anti-corruption*

WCLAC Board of Directors adopted an anti-corruption policy that aims to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, the policy provides guidelines to all of WCLAC employees during their daily operations through providing the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any corrupt actions or practices. By doing so, this policy will assist the Center to conduct its operations with integrity, accountability, honesty, transparency and to prevent any form of corruption and bribery.

Our organization's long-standing commitment to assisting women in achieving their rights with integrity means avoiding corruption in any form, including bribery, maintaining confidentiality and privacy while providing services, as well as complying with the anti-corruption law. We provide guidance to our team (lawyers, social workers and field workers) on how to conduct legal aid, testimonies and counselling in a fair, ethical and legal manner. All associates of our organization are required to read, understand and follow the precepts of our Code of Conduct and procurement manual, which includes anti-corruption expectations for all employees. WCLAC decision making process is done at different levels to ensure transparency and accountability. Based on the organizational structure and internal procedures, decisions taken at the Board of Directors are separate and binding for the whole organization. These decisions are separate from those taken by executive management. Further, WCLAC has developed its procurement manual in a way that ensures transparency and separation of roles and responsibilities throughout the procurement process. A committee is defined to open and review tenders responsible of analyzing the offers technically and financially and present their recommendation. The decision is then taken by another level, which is a major part of the anti-corruption process WCLAC follows.

## Part II. Detailed Activity Report

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### Strategic goal 1: Enhanced protection of women suffering from discrimination and violence in Palestine

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#### *1.1. Quality social and legal services are provided to women exposed to discrimination and violence*

*WCLAC provides social-legal counselling and protection services to Palestinian women in order to promote their self-autonomy and raise understanding of their rights and how to claim them through social counselling or Sharia courts. WCLAC's human rights feminist approach to support women's access to justice is conditioned with examining all options available to obtain legal settlement, either through court representation or mediation.*

*In 2022, a total of 1197 women victims of GBV were provided with direct legal and social services through one-off legal or social consultations and long term social and legal counselling.*

*A total of 410 women victims of GBV were supported to access their social and legal rights in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Analysis of these cases shows that 44% of the women beneficiaries live in the city, 29% live in a village yet 28% of these live in area C. Most of the legal cases that WCLAC dealt with revolved around divorce (25.5% of the cases), custody (12% of the cases) and alimony (54% of the cases). The high rate of the cases was mainly related to alimony, which reflects the poverty and living conditions of these women as they depend on the sum of money as a source of living/income as they lack other financial resources due to early marriage, or not completing their studies. For instance, analysis of the cases shows that 63% of women beneficiaries are housewives, while 54% of women beneficiaries' income is less than 500 NIS (less than 150 \$, which is below the property line). Analysis also shows that 1% of these women are illiterate, 56% of them didn't complete their education and 9.75% of them were married at an early age, less than 18 years old.*

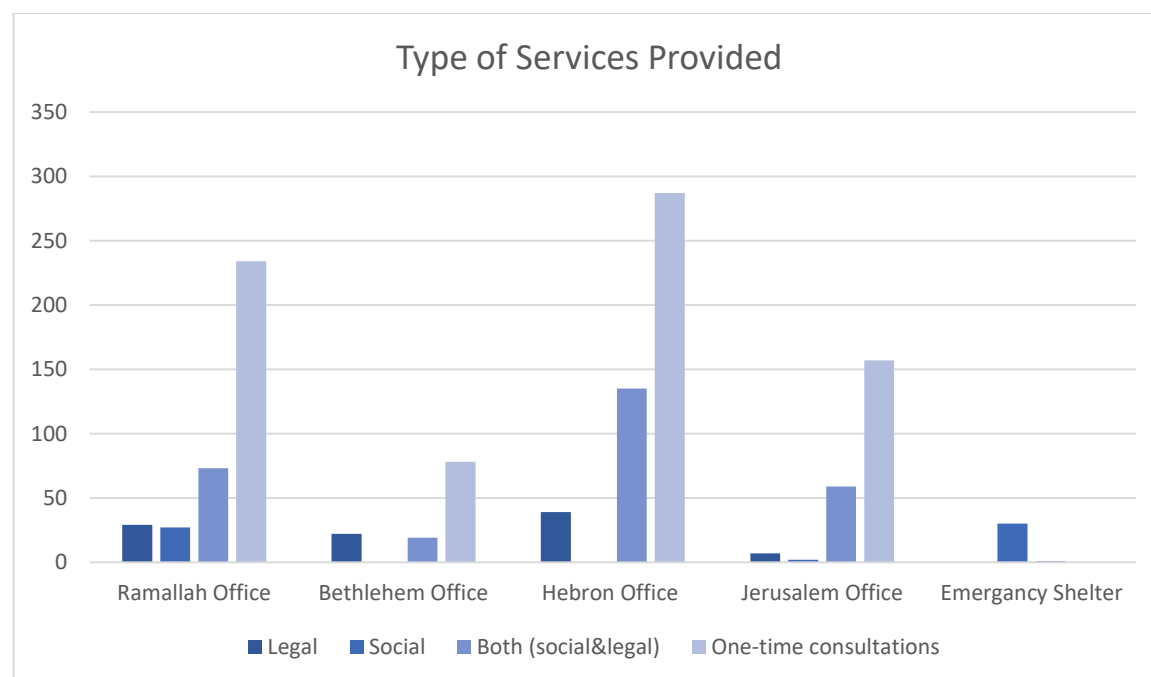
*WCLAC managed to support women access their legal rights through obtaining 405 legal verdicts in their own favor with a ratio of 72.32% of the total cases. WCLAC also managed to support 144 cases to access*

their legal rights through out-of-court settlements and mediation facilitated by WCLAC's lawyers and social workers. Further, WCLAC feminist approach ensures investing comprehensive and collective efforts to empower women by increasing their awareness on their social and legal rights and equip them with knowledge to protect and claim their rights. While litigating on behalf of women before the Shari'a and Ecclesiastical Courts WCLAC social workers provide psychosocial support through a well-defined intervention plan designed with women themselves.

WCLAC continued to support and build the capacities of the grassroots' organizations, Al-Najdeh Association in Tulkarem, the Tubas Charitable Society, the Jericho Women's Charitable Society, and the Bint Al-Reef Association in Dura/Hebron, to provide legal and social services to women victims of violence in marginalized areas. These partner CBOs extended the social and legal services to 199 women, and pleaded before Sharia courts in 148 cases in favor of women.

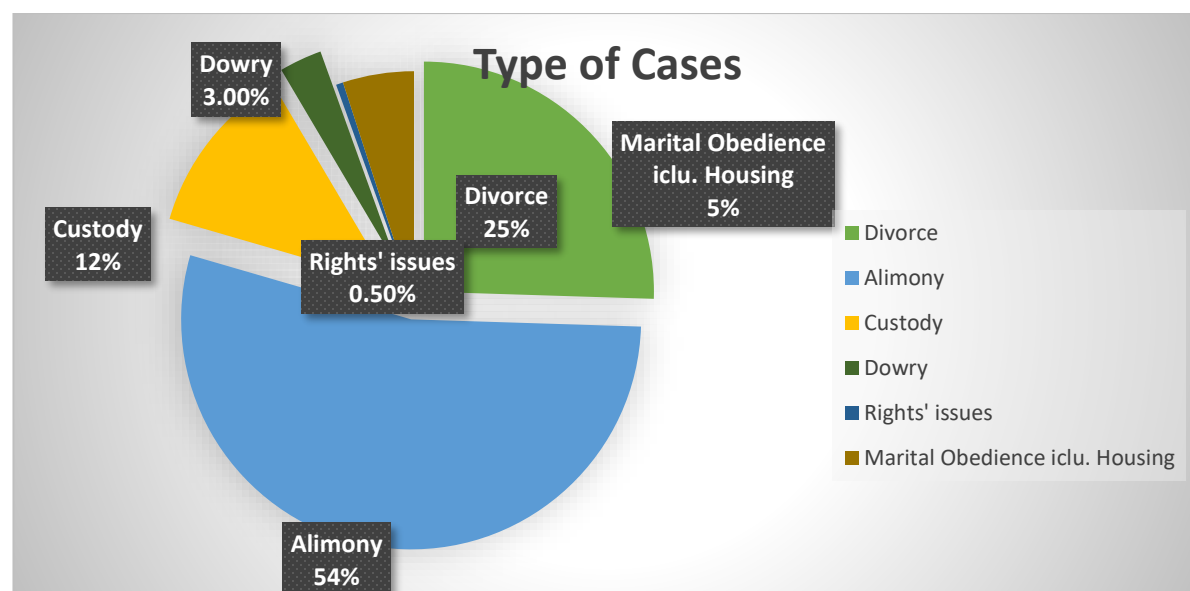
### 1.1.1. Provide quality legal and social services that respond to the needs of women exposed to violence and discrimination

WCLAC provides some of the most vital and effective services for female survivors of GBV through four organisational branches: Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Jerusalem as well as protection services through its emergency protection shelter. Over the reporting period, WCLAC provided long-term legal or social counselling to 410 women of all ages, 195 of whom were from Ramallah and Jerusalem, 215 of whom were from the Southern West Bank.



WCLAC has found that certain social realities are exacerbating women's suffering, requiring social or legal support. Some of these conditions include: early marriage, polygamy, poverty, unemployment, and denial of education that can prevent women from achieving full access to their rights and economic independence.

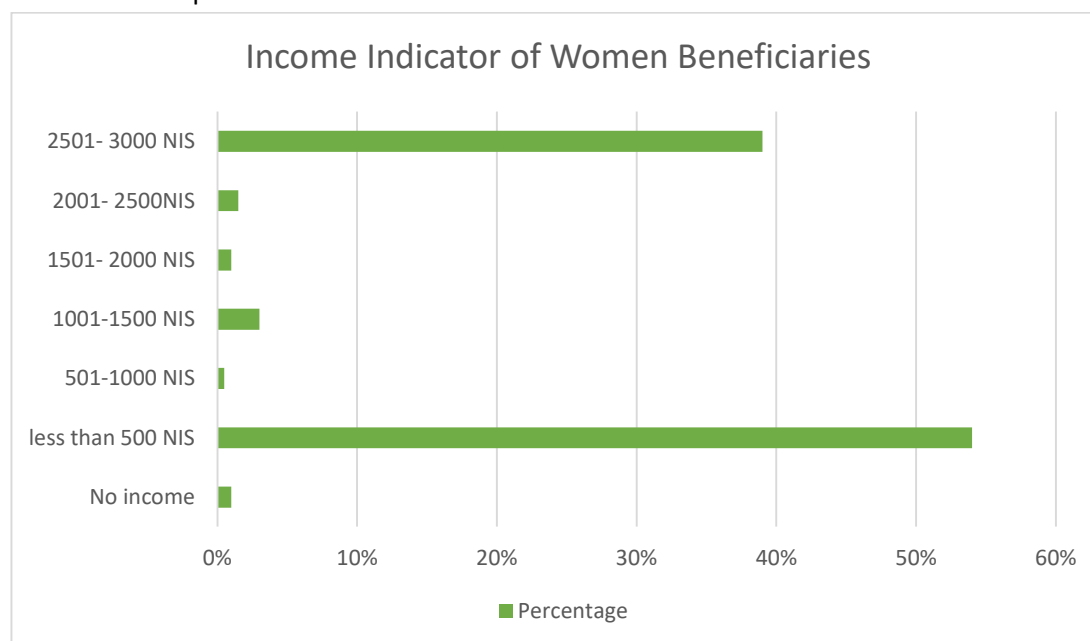
Throughout the reporting period, 560 new cases (and 229 cases were followed from previous due to long court procedures) for legal support were brought to WCLAC, three of them were brought in front of Ecclesiastical courts. Each woman might have more than one court case.. Since the start of the year WCLAC's lawyers obtained **405 verdicts** in favour of the women in addition to 144 cases were closed through mediation by WCLAC's team of lawyers and social workers. A number of cases is still pending due to lengthy court procedures.. It is worth noting that through mediation, WCLAC was able to support the relevant parties in reaching long-term solutions to the problems faced by women victims of GBV. WCLAC was able to support these women to claim some or all of their rights via agreements signed by the husband/family member without bringing the case to court.



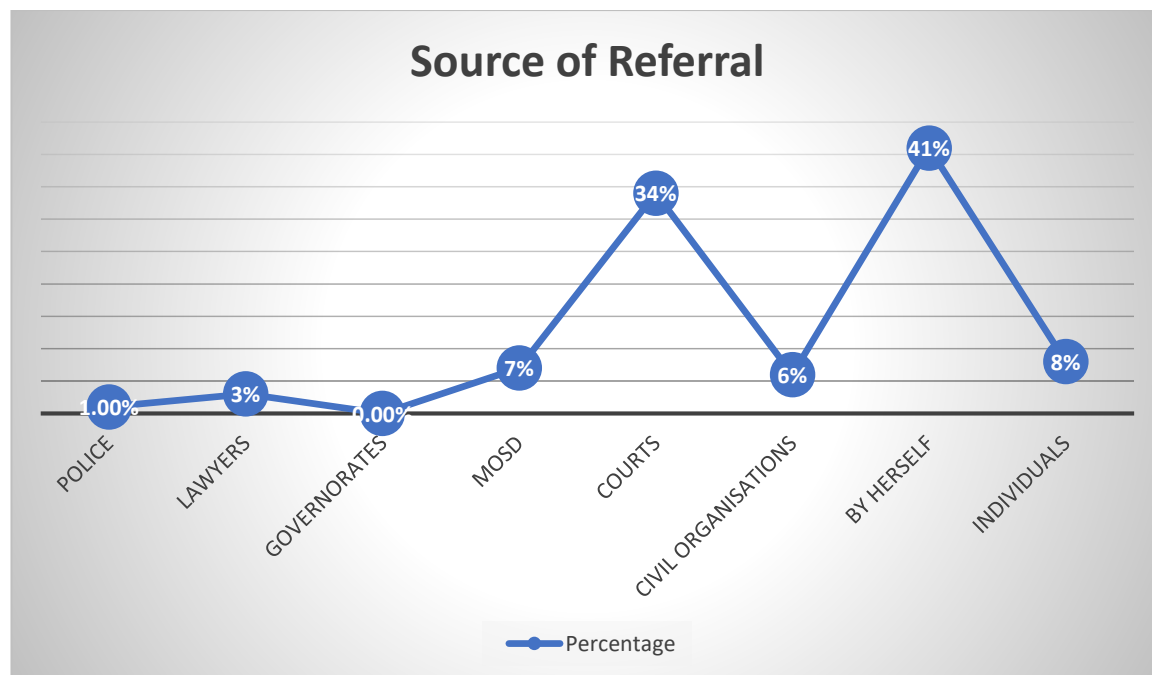
As the above chart shows most of the legal cases WCLAC followed during year 2022 revolved around personal status issues. A ratio of 54% of the cases were around alimony, 25.5% of the cases were related to divorce, and 12% were related to children's custody. As for the rest of cases, 3% focused on dowry, 0.50% on rights' issues and 5% of the cases were on marital obedience and housing. Cases of alimony are still high, which still reflect the dire living conditions of these women, which imposes them to look for any means of income to maintain themselves and their children. These depend on the alimony which doesn't provide just life for these women (it's around 400-600 NIS per month) due to the lack of other sources of income. Therefore, sometimes the women head to court to increase alimony which represent an impasse for many women, as according to the law, a woman can demand an increase in her alimony only if the husband's situation improves financially. In this case it is the woman's responsibility to prove this to the court, which might be impossible as these women do not have enough evidence on the financial situation of the husband. As for the increase in a child's alimony, especially that children's needs increase while they grow-up, unfortunately the increase only happens every six months. The woman has to file a new lawsuit enduring lengthy and complicated procedures to have an increase of between 30 to 50 shekels only, per month, per

child. This situation keeps women and their children in a dire economic situation given that most women have no other source of income.

The economic situation of these women can't be detached from the realities they live in. Data shows that 63% of the women are housewives, while 3% are irregularly employed and 8% are unemployment, while the rest are students, employed in the public or civil society sector. As for educational background, 41% of the women finished high school, 1% were illiterate, 15% haven't completed school, 16% have a BA degrees while 16% have a diploma..Data also shows that 28% of the women live in area C, which poses an obstacle towards the implementation court decisions.



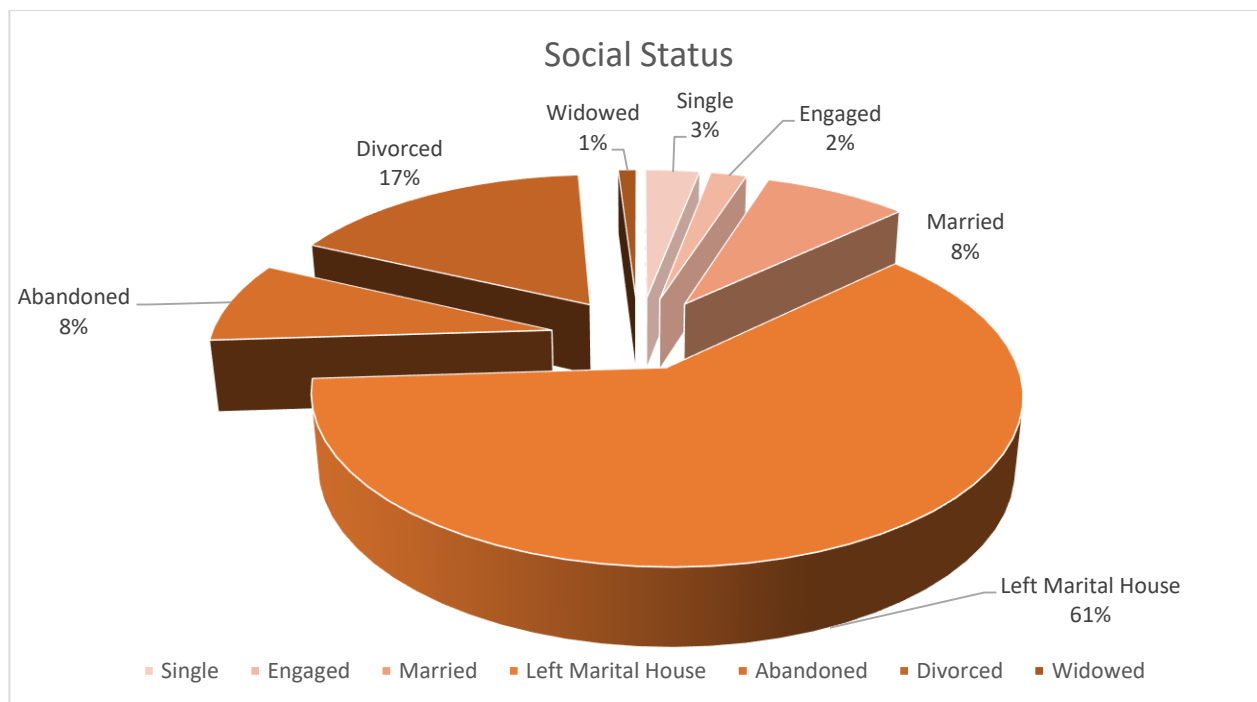
As for referral of these cases to our offices, data analysis reveals that 11% of the women were referred to WCLAC by partners, 3% were referred from other lawyers, 8% from other people, 6% were referred by other NGOs and 34% were referred by the courts. The high ratio of women (45%) was referred by courts, MOSD and partner organization reflects confidence of WCLAC's quality of services and professionalism of its team of lawyers and social workers. Yet, 41% approached WCLAC directly, which reflects the impact of awareness raising messages that were disseminated on our services through the social media and local radio stations.



As for the social counselling, during the reporting period most of the cases were combined with legal services where a total of 286 women requested both social and legal counselling, and only 27 women requested social counselling only. Demographic analysis of these women shows that 79.5% were less than 40 years, and most of them have been exposed to marital infidelity more than once, whether through social media or a direct relationship. Further, a ratio of 28% of women were victims of physical violence, victims of blackmailing, economic deprivation (alimony). As for the nature of the cases a ratio of 45% of cases were related to marital disputes between the women and the husbands, especially that the husband's family were interfering with their marital life. Yet, a ratio of 27% of the women highlighted that their spouses suffer from physiological disorders which results in disputes as they were unaware of this issue before getting married. Moreover, through the social session this year WCLAC noticed that in cases related to divorce and discord they were related to polygamy, abandonment, infertility, infidelity, inability to call for divorce for social barriers.

It should be mentioned that in most of the cases and due to the differences between the spouse' IDs and the different applied legal systems, as well as the lengthy of legal procedures, women usually call for spousal and social counselling to reach agreements that won't affect the children. These spousal and family counseling sessions Or due to the fact that the family refuses divorce or eve accepting their daughters with their children, women stand against their will and choose to stay in the marital house and accept social counselling.





As the above chart shows a ratio of 61% of the women approached WCLAC have left the marital house. Most of these women live with their families while filing the lawsuit, which means they will be dependent on their families to financially maintain them and their children. This increases women's suffering as they might be imposed return to the marital home and endure the husband's violence due to their limited choices. Further, a ratio of 17% are divorced, 2.8% of women were victims of early marriage and were married at 14-16 years old. Some of the women expressed that endogamy is a problem (as women might be unable to seek divorce to maintain family relations, or it urges them to waiver their legal rights). It was obvious through analysing these cases that living in the same place of the husband's family or in a close neighbourhood might lead up to serious family disagreements due to general interference in the woman's daily life. It should be mentioned that most of the women sought help due to their husbands' out-of-wed lock relations.

#### *Provide one-off legal and social consultations*

In addition to long-term services, WCLAC is an active facilitator/ provider of one-off legal and social consultations for women. This service helps women obtain social and legal advice prior to making any decision regarding their cases. The consultations are provided after awareness raising sessions, e-counselling, and through the free helpline. A total of 756 one-off consultations were provided, 234 out of which were provided through the free helpline. Further a total of 528 follow up counselling sessions were provided.

The one-off consultations revolved around maintenance, custody, dispersion, divorce and family reunification cases, implementation of court decisions, custody, arbitrary divorce, and national insurance. There were also numerous social consultations on family problems, marital disputes, social empowerment, sexual assaults, marital problems, psychological support, shelter and sexual harassment.

#### ***Success Story: On WCLAC support to a woman stop her father's guardianship***

R.A. is a 23-year-old law graduate she approached WCLAC to file a complaint against preventing marriage. She was lived with her mother who took the responsibility of raising her and her siblings after divorce. She said "My parents have been separated for a long time, and I am the eldest of my brothers. Whenever someone proposes to me, my father would refuse the matter without a clear reasons. I used to respect his opinion until one day a guy proposed but again my dad refused." R.A approached WCLAC to support her getting married and to overcome father's manipulation of his right as a guardian who should give the consent of his daughter's marriage.

WCLAC supported R.A. to file a lawsuit against the father's guardianship. According to the three Sunni religious doctrines, the decree entitles the woman to bring the matter before a judge, against her guardian who prevents her marriage. It should be mentioned that the applied personal status laws are still unfair to women. As girls or women who have never been married must have the consent of her guardian. If the father refuses, a case must be filed and be proceeded at the court, until the court decides that if the father is intransigent against agreeing to the marriage, the judge will use his general jurisdiction and agree on being her own guardian so she can get married

So WCLAC filed the lawsuit to drop the father's guardianship and to give the older brother the legal permission to give consent to his sister's marriage. The case was successfully where the fathers' guardianship was replaced with the older brother's. As such R.A. managed to get married without the need to her father's consent and to stop his guardianship, which could have prevented her from going on with her life the way she wishes.

*1.1.2. Extend women's service provision to underserved communities of Palestine through supporting partner grassroots in Jericho, Tubas, Tulkarem and southern Hebron to provide quality services to women victims of GBV*

Since 2005 WCLAC has worked with grassroots organizations in marginalized communities and remote areas of the West Bank to extend services to women victims of GBV in remote and marginalized communities. This has been done through extensive capacity building and coaching to provide quality social and legal counselling to women victims of GBV as well as raising the awareness of local community members. WCLAC continued providing supervision sessions to the team of social workers and lawyers of these CBOs to ensure providing quality services to women. This is combined with building the CBOs staff capacities and developing systems to institutionalize their work, so they become local resource organizations for social change.

In 2022, the four women CBOs' Women Charitable Society (JWCS) in Jericho, Nahdet Bent Al Reef Charitable Society (NBRCs) in southern Hebron, Tubas Charitable Society and Al-Najdeh in Tulkarem provided social and legal services to 281 women. Additionally, 109 women were represented in courts cases. The majority of the cases are women being deprived of their rights either from the family or the husband especially dowry, alimony, whilst the remainder cover custody, divorce, house rental and physical violence. Yet, 43 women were referred to other services providers such as Doctors without Borders, Police, and protection networks.

The two CBOs, JWCS and NBRCs reached out to the local communities conducting a total of 60 awareness raising sessions attended by 827 women and 202 men. These sessions focused on raising the awareness of women on domestic violence, existing laws that would support women to access and protect their rights, the National Referral System, marriage rights, divorce rights, alimony, child custody, the psychological impact of divorce, raising awareness in the health rights and special conditions of that can be put in the marriage contract.

WCLAC continued its comprehensive support to partner CBOs through providing technical support and follow-up meetings with the two CBOs to ensure the provision of quality services to women victims of GBV. A total of 37 supervision sessions were carried out in which work plans were discussed, with the focus on the provision of legal and social services provided to women victims of GBV. Other points of discussions during the sessions included challenges facing lawyers while litigating on behalf of women before the Shari'a courts, clarifications of cases regulations and the work plans.

### *1.1.3. Develop capacities of service unit staff to provide better services to women victims of violence*

#### *Provide service unit staff with knowledge and skills required to provide social, legal, protection services and awareness activities to women*

WCLAC views the personal and professional development of its team of lawyers and social workers as key for providing quality services to women victims of GBV. Ultimately, the team will be able and to effectively respond to the needs of Palestinian women and design responsive intervention plans. During the reporting period, 14 of WCLAC's Service and Empowerment Unit staff participated in 12 supervision sessions on crisis intervention, during which they discussed the roles of female lawyers and social workers in dealing with cases, case management, the challenges that each of them face in dealing with cases, and how to build intervention responsive and relevant intervention plans.

## 1.2. Protection of women victims of GBV under the national referral system is strengthened by engaging different relevant sectors

WCLAC's has long experience as a feminist human rights organization to provide protection to women victims of GBV and the initiation of the National Referral System in 2013. This accumulated knowledge and experience was transferred to the other two shelters in the West Bank. As such WCLAC provided three supervision sessions for 14 staff members of Jericho emergency shelter and Nablus Shelter focused on better defining the role of house mothers, team building, and dealing with challenges while working with women hosted at the shelters.

WCLAC continued providing protection to women whose lives are under threat through its emergency shelter and based on the National Referral System. In 2022, a total of 32 women victims of GBV were hosted at the emergency protection shelter in Jericho (accompanied by 4 children). This shelter is a place of immediate protection for women whose lives are under threat and in need of immediate intervention. WCLAC believes that the shelter is only a temporary safe space for women to seek protection and does not substitute the need for social and communal transformation on the approach to GBV.

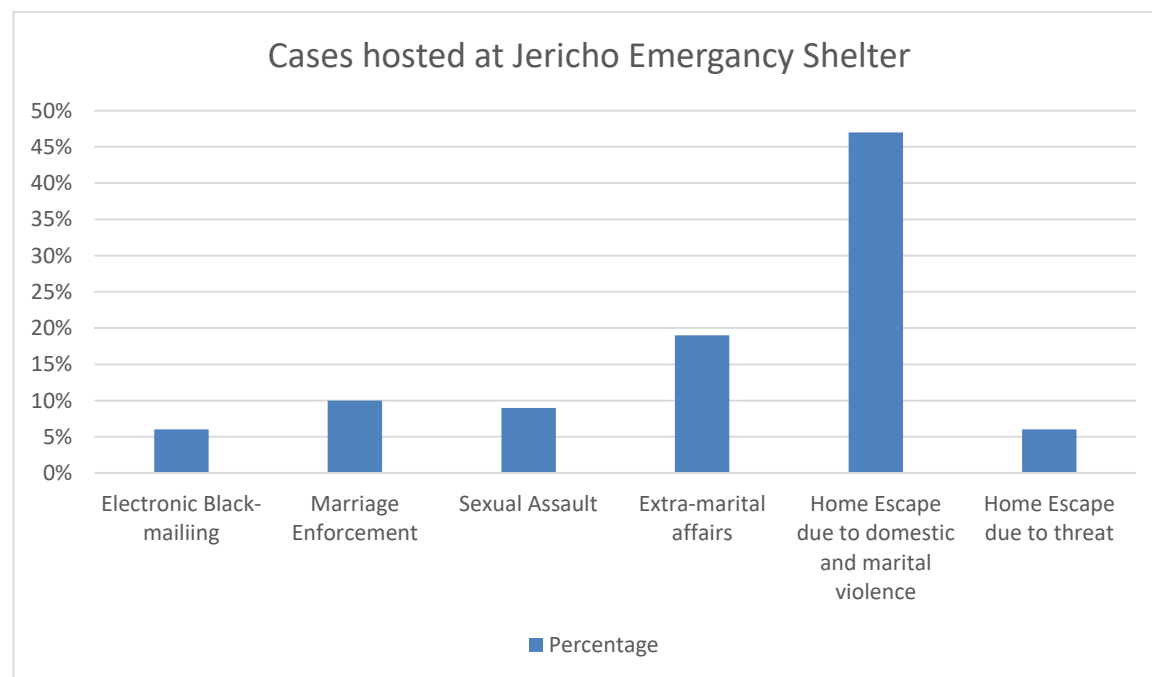
Professional interventions were facilitated in partnership with the Family Protection Unit at the Police, the Governorate and the Ministry of Social Development through carrying out 43 case conferences, along with 8 meetings with the families of these women. These interventions resulted in returning 22 women safely to their families with an emphasis on ensuring the prevention from violence and preservation of their dignity. Ten women were referred to another shelter for extensive intervention.

During the reporting period, WCLAC supported the three protection shelters for women victims of GBV (Jericho emergency shelters, Nablus Shelter and Bethlehem) to develop the code of ethics to better institutionalize service provision within these shelters. This was done through reviewing the moral principles of the protection shelters to create a conducive environment for beneficiaries and workers. This code of ethics will serve as the guiding standard that will govern and organize practices, behaviors and trends of the workers at the protection shelters. It sets the main basis for developing the code of ethics, which describes the ethical and legal standards between beneficiaries in protection shelters and the staff.

For this Year, WCLAC established a new protection Network in Nablus, and continued to develop the capacities of service providers' members of the other five local protection networks (Tubas, Hebron, Jericho, Tulkarim, Qalqiliya) formed from representatives of Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, The Family Protection Unit at the Police, Shari's High Judicial Council, and representatives from civil society service providers. In 2022, WCLAC conducted 30 meetings for these networks focusing on challenges faced while creating a gender sensitive dialogue that empowers women. The protection networks implemented 8 initiatives, and WCLAC built their capacities of 49 members on "human rights values and principles in dealing with women victims of violence".

### 1.2.1. Provide emergency protection services to women whose lives are in jeopardy, and survivors of violence

WCLAC continued providing protection to women whose lives under threat through its emergency shelter and based on the National Referral System. In 2022, 32 women victims of GBV were hosted at the emergency protection shelter in Jericho (accompanied by 4 children). This shelter is a place of immediate protection for women whose lives are under threat and in need of immediate intervention. WCLAC believes that the shelter is only a temporary safe space for women to seek protection and does not substitute the need for social and communal transformation on the approach to GBV. Analysis of the cases show that the majority with a ratio of 50% were married, 28% were single, 15% were divorced 3% were engaged and 3% were widowed. Further, analysis of the nature of the cases shows that most women sought protection escaping family retaliation for out-of-wedlock relationships or pregnancy, inter-family violence, domestic violence, blackmailing and denial of rights. Data shows that a ratio 53% of the women hosted at the shelter ran away as a result of a real-life threat due to out of wedlock relations. A ratio of 47% encountered physical violence for more than one time and 10% were forced into marriage. Analysis also shows that 61% of the cases were between the age of 21 to 35, 10% were between the age of 21 to 25, 23% were between the age of 16 to 20, while 6% were over the age of 40 years old. The lack of employment and study opportunities also increased vulnerability to GBV among women as they became trapped within their social sphere. Analysis of the cases show that 65% of the women hosted at the shelter did not complete higher education and 32% of them did not have any source of income. Moreover, these cases suffer from a mix of socio-economic problems, an absence of free dialogue between family members, emotional neglect and electronic exploitation were all leading to numerous social problems.



Professional interventions were facilitated in partnership with the Family Protection Unit at the Police, the Governorate and the Ministry of Social Development through carrying out 43 case conferences, along with

nine meetings with the family either in person or through the phone. These interventions resulted in returning 22 women safely to their families after ensuring better protected conditions. The remaining ten women were referred to another shelter for extensive intervention.

It's worth mentioning that these women fill post assessment after leaving the shelter to evaluate the interventions as well as the privacy and the safety in the shelter. Accordingly, 100% of the women beneficiaries felt that the team at the shelter were responsive to their needs, 97% asserted that they felt safe, 100% declared that the protection mechanisms were clear to them, 100% felt that there is privacy and secrecy in dealing with their case files. Yet, 90% felt that the shelter helped them in solving their problems and 79% were satisfied that they are going to be referred to other shelters due to their need of extensive interventions.

One of the challenges while hosting women at the emergency shelter lack of procedure related to hosting women with i Jerusalem IDs or are married to Jerusalemites by Israeli affairs.. The absence of a psychiatrist at the Jericho Health Directorate is create a major challenge given that assessment is needed for women who are suffering from psychological disorder prior to being hosted at the shelter. This assessment is required to define whether the women are in need of medication or social counselling only. . To overcome this issue WCLAC tend to consult a private psychiatrist to provide the assessment for women hosted at the shelter who are in need of such consultation.

Service providers are deliberately not referring women beneficiaries to protection shelter and kept them in the Family Protection Unit for more than 48 hours, while trying to re-integrate them with their families, in violation of the National Referral System. This does not serve the victim's self-determination principle, which must be studied and in-depth. In general, reports received from service providers regarding cases that are referred to the protection shelters are weak and do not have all relevant information. Thus, shelters staff; especially social workers obtain more information about the case from women themselves through data collection. This is combined with limited follow-up from service providers, especially MOSD offices with families of the women hosted at the shelters, which might affect their return back safely to their home in due time.

### *1.2.2. Support the 3 Shelters in the West Bank and develop their staff capacities*

WCLAC has long experience as a feminist human rights organization to provide protection to women victims of GBV and the initiation of the National Referral System in 2013. This accumulated knowledge and experience was transferred to the other two shelters in the West Bank. As such WCLAC provided three supervision sessions for 14 staff members of Jericho emergency shelter and Nablus Shelter focused on better defining the role of house mothers, finding specialized team, dealing with challenges while working with women beneficiaries. These supervision sessions also discussed challenges faced while hosting women at the shelters, methods of defining professional boundaries. Finally, follow-up on work details related to

women hosted at the shelters and its reflection on their role within the shelter as well as discussing self-care in terms of professional and personal levels among staff members.

WCLAC also realizes the impact of being on call all the time and dealing on daily basis with difficult cases women victims of violence at the shelters. Thus, WCLAC conducted wellbeing retreat for the emergency shelter housemothers and professional staff. The activity was a venue for the shelter staff to release stress and learn new practical techniques to relief stress to provide quality services to women victims of violence.

During the reporting period, WCLAC also conducted an exchange visit for the three shelters of Mehwar, Nablus and Jericho emergency Shelters. This provided the ground for these shelters to exchange experiences and create an opportunity to develop collective thinking in facing complex challenges at work as well as discussing cases and understand the different targeted groups and intervention mechanisms.

WCLAC supported the three protection shelters for women victims of GBV (Jericho emergency shelters, Nablus Shelter and Bethlehem) to develop the code of ethics to better institutionalize service provision within these shelters. This was done through reviewing the moral principles of the protection shelters to create a conducive environment for beneficiaries and workers. This code of ethics will serve as the guiding standard that will govern and organize practices, behaviors and trends of the workers at the protection shelters. It sets the main basis for developing the code of ethics, which describes the ethical and legal standards between beneficiaries in protection shelters and the staff. Accordingly, WCLAC followed a participatory approach to develop the code of ethics based on discussion with the shelters staff to collect all related information. This will enable us to build on the practical experience of the shelters' staff. To achieve this, a training was conducted with the shelters staff followed by a meeting of WCLAC project staff to define how to document the best practices to be reflected in the code of ethics.

This was followed by a participatory training that was held for the staff of the Jericho emergency shelter and Nablus Safe House with the aim of examining the context in which codes of conduct are adopted by the two shelters. During the training session participants emphasized the main principles they follow while working with women victims of GBV hosted at the shelters. This was also a good opportunity for shelters' staff to exchange knowledge and experience on providing better and quality services to women victims of GBV.

#### *1.2.5. Build 5 local networks, includes organizations providing services in three sectors social, health and legal (MOH, MOSD, police) and other CSOs that provide services to women victims of GBV)*

WCLAC continued to develop the capacities of service providers' members of five local protection networks (Tubas, Hebron, Jericho, Tulkarim, Qalqiliya) formed from representatives of Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, The Family Protection Unit at the Police, Shari's High Judicial Council, and representatives from civil society service providers. The main purpose of these protection networks is to develop their capacities to provide quality services to women victims of GBV based on the National Referral System and create better referral linkages. The Networks creates a venue for the members to exchange



knowledge and experience and to plan and carry out local initiatives to reach out to their local communities and aiming at raising public awareness on women's rights.

WCLAC held two meetings with the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Women's Affairs to follow up on building the new protection network in Nablus. The meetings focused on the development and structural process of networks, which meets with the Ministry's direction in this aspect, the structure and the specialized plan related to the work of the networks. The meetings also focused on methods of define the plan for the networks, through which we seek to come up with a conceptual paper on the role and reference of these networks. As for the selection criteria of members from service providers focused on the level of engagement and understanding of the National Referral System in available.

Currently, the six Protection Networks have 90 representatives (78 females and 12 males) from different service providers. In 2022, WCLAC conducted 30 meetings for these networks focusing on challenges faced while creating a gender sensitive dialogue that empowers women, how to increase the dialogue among the population in order to combat the hostile discourse that is going on against CSOs in general, and women organizations in particular. Discussion among members of these networks also focused their role as service providers in light of the amended National Referral System. Secific focus was on the importance of developing the infrastructure, internal procedeurs and building the capacities of service providers so they can implement the amended National Referral System once approved by the Palestinian Cabinet.

WCLAC carried out two trainings for 42 services providers (34 females and 8 males) focused on analyzing the reality and the role of coordination between members of protection networks as well as human rights values and principles in dealing with women victims of violence. The training aimed at unifying the human rights principles and values that guide the behavior of service providers during the intervention and work with women by understanding the rights of women who receive the service, as well as the professional and ethical warnings facing service providers.

A 2-day centralized workshop for protection networks was held targeting members of the protection networks from six governorates (Nablus - Qalqilya - Tulkarm - Tubas - Hebron and Jericho). As a result the networks came out with a code of conduct that constitutes the professional and ethical reference for service providers in dealing with women victims of violence. The work groups also came up with a vision of the structure and reference that is expected to govern and organize the work of these Protection Networks in Palestine. The Networks perceived an expansion of their work to cover other governorates, which will ensuring providing quality protection services to women in different communities. .

Through the coaching sessions that aimed at supporting the Protection Networks to reach out to their community, eight local initiatives were conducted. These initiatives were launched during the International Women's Day and 16 Days of Combating GBV and revolved around awareness raising of 128 women in Area C and listen to their stories, as well as introduce them to protection networks their roles and types of services they provide. The initiatives also raised the awareness of the Military Police Collage , attended by 120 participants from the police and college staff, during which the role of governmental and non-

governmental institutions in enhancing the protection of Palestinian women and the transfer mechanisms between protection organizations was discussed.

## Strategic goal 2: Promote women's rights to access justice and eliminate discriminatory policies against women

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### *2.1. Policies and procedures to eliminate discrimination against women in Palestine are addressed*

#### *2.1.1. Review of laws and policies to modify them in accordance with CEDAW*

***Contribute to preparing CEDAW shadow report to the PA and submit it to the PA and submit it to the CEDAW special Committee***

WCLAC has always played a major role in reviewing existing laws to promote gender equality, while simultaneously recognizing that legal reform requires both cultural transformation and political will. As such WCLAC continued to advocate for better protection for women through revision of the Family Protection Bill. WCLAC, Al-Muntada Forum to Combat Violence against Women and the Amal Coalition have previously submitted several recommendations on how to render the new law more gender sensitive and secure better protection against gender-based violence. WCLAC and other women's organizations are joining efforts to encourage the passage of the law in order to provide the necessary legal framework for women victims of violence.

Several meetings were held in cooperation with Al-Muntada to discuss the draft of the Family Protection Law. One of these meeting focused on religious perspective, and religious discourse of violence, in terms of Family Protection Bill. Additionally, in September, WCLAC along with Al-Muntada participated in a joint activity to learn about the Jordanian experience regarding the implementation of the Family Protection Law and the obstacles that limit its implementation.

WCLAC and Al Muntada submitted a report to the 85<sup>th</sup> Pre-Sessional Working Group of the CEDAW Committee on the State of Palestine. The report the government response to CEDAW Committee's to the State report in 2018 and the follow-up report in 2020. WCLAC attended the Pre-Session of the Working Groups o CEDAW Committee where it met with the Committee members presented the report with recommendations.

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, the CEDAW Committee published the list of issues and questions addressed to the State of Palestine. The list of issues addressed a number of recommendations set forth in our report.

For example, CEDAW Committee included in its list of issues a recommendation to the Palestinian government on the Family Protection Bill. In specific, the Committee asked the government to explain **“The status of any legislative projects to draft a family protection law to ensure that women and girls are protected from gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and to provide for the issuance of protection orders”**. This recommendation, was one of the recommendations WCLAC addressed in the report that was submitted to CEDAW Committee.

#### *2.1.4. Review laws, policies and develop interventions to promote women's economic rights*

##### *Review laws and policies that violate women's economic and social rights*

WCLAC focuses on women's economic and social rights in Palestine through advocating for better laws that are based on justice and equality. As part of the celebration activities of International Women's Day 2022, WCLAC held a national event to launch a study “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Between the Absence of the Law and The Denial of Existing Culture”. The study was based on literature review, focus groups discussions and interviews with women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The study presented a number of recommendations related to the legal system through, for example, the adoption of specific laws that penalize and prosecute sexual harassment, modification of the Civil Service Law so it punishes and penalizes sexual harassment in the workplace. Recommendations also focused on awareness raising to challenge existing culture and stereotypes on sexual harassment. Further, specific focus was on the importance of establishing national mechanisms to document cases of sexual harassment in the workplace and develop monitoring indicators.

##### *Personal Status Law*

WCLAC continued its cooperation with the General Union of Palestinian Women develop the vision and the bylaws of the Personal Status Coalition. ,

As a result, on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2022, WCLAC with the Personal Status Law coalition conducted a workshop for the coalition members from Gaza and the West Bank in Ramallah with participation Via Zoom. The workshop was attended by 40 members of the coalition to discuss the reactivation of the Personal Status Coalition, and review the vision paper and the bylaws related to it. The workshop included a deep discussion about what is the nature of the required personal status law, and what are the coalition's demands and vision. It was agreed to hold upcoming sessions to complete the discussion on the Palestinian Personal Status Law and to agree on all the details related to the coalition's demands.

##### *Family Protection Bill*

Since the end of last year, during December 2021, WCLAC was alerted through media reports that the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of the Family Protection Law was being discussed at the Palestinian Cabinet weekly meeting. Upon that, WCLAC in cooperation with Al Muntada called for an urgent meeting to discuss the exclusion of women-led NGOs from the process. In December 2021, the Palestinian Cabinet discussed the draft Family Protection Law. Palestinian civil society and women organizations have not participated in the review of this draft prior to being sent to the Palestinian Cabinet. Therefore, Al Muntada for Combating Violence Against Women, which WCLAC is a member of sent an urgent official letter to the Prime Minister's Office. The letter specifically focused on the leading role women organizations played in developing previous drafts of the Family Protection Law, where their contribution was very crucial and based on their practical experience working with women victims of GBV. Thus, the exclusion of women organizations from the process of reviewing subsequent drafts will adversely affect the whole process of having technical expertise of civil society organizations.

Within WCLAC's strategy related to advocating for better protection for women through the upcoming revision of the Family Protection Law, WCLAC and Al-Muntada Forum to Combat Violence against Women carried out a meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022 with the Legal Committee at Al Muntada to discuss the new draft law and to define changes made on the previous draft that was submitted to the Cabinet. WCLAC introduced a number of comments which included: The introductory note must include explanation on the philosophy and principles of the law and the social and legal justifications for its adoption, as well as the social need for it based on the legislative plan of the State of Palestine. Review of the new draft law also showed that the definitions section requires modifications to ensure compliance with international human rights conventions; especially CEDAW. The definition section of discrimination, which was included in previous draft was taken out from this draft. Finally, concerning the definition of the family, it needs special clarification of the changes made on the definition of the family in the modified version of the Family Protection Bill. This is; especially important because the Sharia judiciary considers the official marriage contract between the woman and man is the determinant for composition of the family. Al Muntada and WCLAC will continue its review of this new draft law and will continue sending its comments to MOWA asking them to consider these comments in the last version prior to approval.

It is worth noting that the counter campaign against the Family Protection Law continued during 2022 intensifying the hate speech against women organizations calling for the adoption of the Law. Defamation also targeted individual women human rights defenders, including WCLAC's general director through naming and shaming her activism and role to influence the adoption of the Law. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, a meeting was organized by AL Muntada held with Palestinian General Attorney at the Prosecution Office aimed at shedding light and discussing the impact of this defamation campaign against feminist human rights activists, which might threaten their lives. WCLAC and Al-Muntada, Al Haq and the Independent Commission for Human Rights also requested the Prosecution Office to provide protection to women who were targets and to take legal measures against these groups who lead this counter campaign.

### *2.1.5 Provide evidence-based data through documentation of femicide cases to influence adoption of the Penal Code*

#### *Document cases of femicide and sexual violence and prepare analytical report*

WCLAC carries out ongoing documentation of cases of femicide specially to collate a strong body of data that would influence policy and decision-making process. A sound argument, grounded in facts, can also be used to pressure the government into taking concrete steps to amend legislation towards protecting women from violence. It should be noted the structural violence inherent in the unequal balance of power relations between the perpetrator and the victim which is reproduced in social life. As a rule, WCLAC documents all deaths of women and girls in the OPT, excluding those caused by the Israeli force. Data is triangulated through different sources to ensure providing reliable evidence, which maintained reliability of WCLAC as a resource in documenting cases of femicide and Palestine.

In 2022, WCLAC have monitored and documented **29 cases** of femicide (8 in Gaza Strip and 21 in the West Bank). WCLAC is in the process of developing the analytical report, which covers cases documented in 2021-2022. A total of 52 cases will be analysed representing the socio-legal aspects around these cases and a set of recommendations to influence policy and decision-making process.

A large number of local and international organizations usually request ongoing updates on numbers of femicide cases because WCLAC is the only organisation documenting those cases. WCLAC also issues analysis reports every two years through providing evidence-based data to influence decision makers to perform legal reform and adopt non-discriminatory laws.

## *2.2 Women rights violations in Palestine are exposed and addressed*

### *2.2.1 Document 600 cases of human rights violations against Palestinian women in the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and in the Gaza Strip*

Palestinian women are affected in a multitude of interrelated and interlocking ways in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Their daily existence and their lives overall—economically, politically, socially, and culturally—reflect the complexities and uncertainties that are true for all Palestinian people, but exacerbated by their gender, socioeconomic position, geography, and legal status, along with other factors.

WCLAC continued the documentation of testimonies from Palestinian women in the OPT on the impact of Israel violations to Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law on their lives. During 2022, WCLAC documented a total of 120 testimonies from Palestinian women in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, 25 of which were produced and translated into [voices](#) on the website. These testimonies reflected the gendered impact of Israeli occupation violations on women and girls in different areas with specific focus on H2 in Hebron, Area C, Sheikh Jarrah, and Silwan. The violations mainly focused on settlers and soldiers' violence and their impact on Palestinian women, house demolition, forced displacement in East Jerusalem neighborhoods and northern Jordan Valley areas, the impact of the Gaza blockade on women, Impact of Israel's harassments at the checkpoints, attacks, and intimidation acts on check points affecting multiple

rights for women and girls such as their right to education, work, health and safety. The testimonies also focused on the impact of Israel's environmental violations on women's health and on their agricultural lands (sewage and wastewater pollution, pesticides on lands, factories pollution), restriction on movement, and access to health and education.

### *2.2.2 Mobilize civil society organizations, solidarity groups and women's organizations in a number of countries shed light on gendered impact of the occupation in their respective countries and organizations*

#### *Hold 10 presentations to visiting delegations of MPs and solidarity groups*

WCLAC provides evidence-based data to shed light on Israeli violations to Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law through various measures. Organizing field visits for visiting delegations is one of the key approaches that give MPs, political parties and other visiting delegations the opportunity to meet with women and listen to their stories directly. During 2022, WCLAC conducted three presentations to visiting delegations.

WCLAC's arranged a field visit to British MPs delegation from UK labor party to H2 Area in Hebron. and the MPs met with a group of women from H2 in Hebron and met at the Human Rights Defenders office near Al Shuhada street checkpoint. During the meeting, the women and girls including one of WCLAC's field workers who lives in Tal Al Rumeideh in H2 area expressed the impact of the Israeli violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law on their lives. Violations included systematic soldiers and settler violence and other forms of harassment and inhumane treatment committed by the Israeli soldiers particularly on checkpoints, arbitrary arrests, and the multiple threats of expulsion from their residency area.

WCLAC presented the gendered impact of Israel occupation to students from James Madison University based on evidence-based data. The presentation focused on house demolitions in East Jerusalem, family reunification, land and private property confiscation in the Northern Jordan Valley and settlers' violence. These meetings provide a venue for the students to learn more about the gendered impact of the occupation as an issue that should be included in any review of human rights violations.

### *2.2.3 Produce reports, reports and debriefings on gendered impact of the occupation*

WCLAC continued its analysis of the testimonies documented on the gendered impact of the Israeli occupation and presented them to different UN procedures. During the first half of 2022, WCLAC developed several reports and parallel reports based on the evidence-based data collected, focusing on the gendered-impact of Israel's HR and IHL violations on the lives of Palestinian women and girls.

Moreover, WCLAC developed 6 monthly [Bulletins](#), and submitted several reports to UN treaty and non-treaty bodies as follows:

*ICCPR parallel report for the Human Rights Committee 134th session, Israel Review.*

2022, WCLAC submitted International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) parallel report for the Human Rights Committee for Israel Review. The submission aimed to provide the committee with comprehensive and evidence-based information on the main forms of violations the state party (Israel) systematically practices in the OPT, with disregard to its responsibilities under the IHL and Covenant. In this report, WCLAC addressed the issue of punitive demolition of houses and eviction orders in East Jerusalem, as well as demolition of schools in the Northern Jordan Valley. Under “Freedom of expression, assembly, and association”, harassment, detention, and arrests of human rights defenders and civil society organizations were discussed. While under “non-discrimination and self-determination”, three violations were thoroughly reflected on 1. Family reunification and equal access to services. 2. Access to land, natural resources, water, and sanitation. 3. Freedom of movement in the Gaza Strip. Lastly, under “Right of life” WCLAC addressed the issue of settlement expansion and settler violence. Recommendations for each violation were provided directly after each section, they addressed.

On February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup>, the formal and informal NGO briefings regarding the **ICCPR submissions** were held. WCLAC participated in both of them. In the formal briefing, WCLAC delivered an Oral Intervention to provide the committee with more information on the issue of family reunification, the discriminatory laws and policies involved, and their gendered impact on women with spouses holding a Jerusalemite Interactive Dialogue (ID). In the informal briefing, WCLAC answered questions asked by members of the committee. It should be mentioned that on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Committee published on the website their concluding observations. They showed concern towards the numerous Israeli violations the Palestinian civil society addressed in their submission and oral interventions. They gave special attention to the arbitrary detention, treatment of detainees, and family visits. In addition, to the issue of family reunification and the right to family life.

#### *ICCPR Parallel report to the Initial Report of the State of Palestine*

WCLAC submitted a parallel report to Palestine’s ICCPR initial report. The report was jointly developed with the Civil Commission for the Independence of Judiciary (Istiqlal) and AL-Muntada The report affirmed that Palestine’s legal commitment to the ICCPR does not absolve Israel, the occupying power, of its responsibilities towards the 1967 occupied Palestinian territory (OPT).

The report requested the State of Palestine to address the latent and root causes of VAW through changing perceptions, eliminating root causes of GBV, adopting laws, offering comprehensive constitutional guarantees, collecting data, and designing programs to combat VAW. In this regard, a broader and more comprehensive rights-based definition to discrimination and GBV should be adopted to ensure better documentation at the national level.

Several recommendations were presented to ICCPR during Review of Palestine’s Report: i) Call on State Party to accelerate the process of the passage of the Family Protection Bill which includes a comprehensive definition of VAW to include sexual, psychological and economic violence; ii) To ensure that Palestinian courts overcome all obstacles for women’s access to justice. The Palestinian family units within the Police and Public Prosecution Office more responsive to their complaints. Also, to take all necessary reforms in the administration of justice sector towards more gender sensitive approaches within the judiciary to



women victims of GBV and/or women victims of GBV. Also provide quality services and free legal aid services to women victims of GBV accessing the system; iii) To adopt comprehensive national legislation to prohibit gender discrimination, including a comprehensive definition of discrimination on the basis of gender to be harmonized with all international conventions and treaties to which the State Party has already acceded; iv) To adopt measures and procedures by the State Party to guarantee equality in marriage, during marriage, or in the event of its dissolution, and the mechanism of providing protection for children and women with disabilities of their rights to a decent life; v) To amend marriage age exceptions be immediately abolished ; vi) To expedite the formation of a national committee to oversee and monitor the application of lawful marriage age, criminalize child marriages and prosecute perpetrators who circumvent the law and do not register those informal marriages in the Sharia courts and vii) Have a legislation or amend the law that commensurate with the rights of the child and ensure the best interests of the child, and raise the age of custody to 18 years, after which the child becomes free to choose.

#### *Parallel Report to Israel's Follow-up Report to ICESCR*

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 WCLAC submitted a [parallel report](#) to Israel's Follow-up report to Concluding Observations to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). WCLAC addressed four themes within which Israel exercises discriminatory laws and policies from a gendered perspective; the free disposal of natural wealth and resources, family reunification, planning and zoning policies in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and water and sanitation. The report heavily relied on evidence-based data monitored and documented by WCLAC in the field, including testimonies of women affected by such practices. The report recognized the disproportionate consequences on women and girls. It also recognized that these systematic discriminatory practices amount to apartheid and gravely contravene the mandated responsibilities and rights by the Covenant including the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to adequate housing, the right to food, and the right to education.

Consequently, the report urged the committee to hold Israel accountable for its environmental violations, and to cease settlement expansion and exploitation of Palestinian natural resources for the benefit of Israeli settlements. It demanded the State Party to immediately repel the re-enacted Citizenship and Entry into Israel law related to family reunification. The report also demanded exerting pressure on Israel to reform its discriminatory planning and building policies in Area C and East Jerusalem including but not limited to military training zonings, the Kaminitz Law and the 1970 Legal and Administrative Matters Law, and to put an end to house demolitions as a punitive measure as they constitute a form of collective punishment. Lastly, the report requested equitable and safe access to water and its natural resources for all Palestinians, and address the humanitarian crisis of water shortage in the Gaza Strip.

#### *Parallel Report to State of Palestine to CAT Committee*

WCLAC submitted a parallel report to the Initial report submitted by the State of Palestine in accordance with article (19) of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). While submitting this report WCLAC affirmed that Palestine's legal commitment to the CAT does not absolve Israel, the occupying power, of its responsibilities towards the 1967 occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Israel, as the occupying power, has effective control over the OPT and therefore,

human rights treaties and conventions are legally binding on all persons under its jurisdiction, including those in the OPT.

The report emphasized that “domestic violence therefore always amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and very often to physical or psychological torture.” As such women have major characteristics that expose them to different forms of violence and ill treatment; especially patriarchal norms, gaps in the national laws and limited political will to comply with international conventions and treaties. Therefore, women in general and women victims of gender-based violence (GBV) are at risk of the consequences of this context through deprivation of their liberty, particularly when it intersects with discrimination and deprivation of other rights, including reproductive rights and violence by private non-state actors in the communities and at home. The State fails to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute and redress torture and ill-treatment when committed by both government officials and private perpetrators, including in the context of domestic violence. This amounts to consent or acquiescence in torture or ill-treatment. WCLAC called to for remedy to victims of domestic violence, the State Party is also responsible for ensuring that victims are compensated adequately through reparation as stated in international human rights standards. The victims should also receive indemnification for the harm and violence sustained, since in some cases, and despite the penalty against the perpetrator, the victim continues to suffer from the effects of the violence to which they were expose.

The report also emphasized that State of Palestine has obligations to take “effective measures”, both general and individualized, to prevent, protect against, respond to and provide redress for torture and ill-treatment. It is required to establish legal provisions, mechanisms and processes that effectively protect people from torture and ill-treatment, including in the context of domestic violence. It must have general, operational, investigative and procedural duties, redress, reparation and non-recurrence, as the Special Rapporteur on torture attested/emphasized in his report. WCLAC in this report called upon the State of Palestine to consider the earlier draft law of the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture (NPM) to ensure that it is impartial, independent of the Executive branch of government, and autonomous both financially and institutionally.

#### ***Femicide Report Submitted to SR on VAW***

WCLAC submitted a report to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women; Mrs. Reem Al-Salem following her call for updated input on femicide, as a contribution to the upcoming thematic report on violence against indigenous women and girls. The report addressed background information and evidence data based on documentation of femicide cases. In specific, the report highlighted challenges in implementing an evidence-based response to the prevention of femicide especially the absence of a National Observatory on Femicide in Palestine, frequent denial of cooperation by the Public Prosecution offices throughout the OPT to provide field researchers working for civil society organizations with the necessary information on femicide cases. The report emphasized that many femicide cases are settled, are registered as death under mysterious circumstances or as suicide, even though the collected testimonies and medical reports tell otherwise. The report also highlighted the absence of a comprehensive protection system to victims of GBV due to the existence of un-unified Palestinian legislation in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip. Hence, the endorsement of the unified Palestinian Penal Code, Personal Status Law and Family Protection Bill is obligatory to guarantee justice and gender equality for women and the absence of a precise definition of the concept of “femicide” to capture all relevant components.

In this report WCLAC provided the Special Rapporteur with some recommendations to be addressed to the Palestinian government. In particular the report called for the endorsement of the unified Palestinian Penal Code, the adoption of the Personal Status Law and the Family Protection Bill. s

#### *Issue urgent appeals when relevant (Depends when opportunity arises)*

WCLAC produced an urgent appeal regarding the assassination of Al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu-Akleh, and the heightened and unlawful attack on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly by the Israeli occupation authorities. It highlighted the potential threat of diminished presence of Palestinian women journalists on the field, and consequently their political participation as human rights defenders. It also addressed the excessive use of force by the occupation’s military and police forces, especially in peacefully assemblies, protests, or simply for raising a flag. Although it was not submitted to special rapporteurs, it was circulated internally and with other Palestinian CSOs. WCLAC also endorsed Al-Haq’s press release, and the Community Action Center’s urgent appeal.

#### *Carry out meetings and debriefings with the Special Rapporteurs on OPT*

UN Commission of Inquiry has been established in May 2021 to investigate underlying root causes of racial discrimination in Palestine.

WCLAC carried out a Formal meeting with UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, which took place in Jordan. During this meeting WCLAC provided information to members of the COI on the gendered impact of Israeli occupation through evidence-based data. WCLAC specifically focused on family reunification law, house demolition in Jordan Valley and East Jerusalem, settler violence, women’s arbitrary detention and arrest of minors.

The COI issued its first [report](#) in June 2022. WCLAC and other human rights organizations believe that this Commission and its unique mandate is an important opportunity to push for an investigation that recognizes the situation as it is in Palestine, and recommends measures towards decolonization accordingly.

Another meeting was virtually conducted with the COI Secretariat upon their request to present a brief on H2 area in Hebron. The presentation included an overview about the social and political situation in the H2 Area, combined with testimonies documented from women in this area. Specific focus was on restriction of access to services (health services, and access to education), violence by Israeli military soldiers and settlers, and economic hardships. In addition, WCLAC informed the Secretariat on the besieged neighborhood of Tel Rumeida, and a personal testimony from WCLAC’s recent visit to the area while accompanying MPs delegation from the UK. They inquired about specific statistics, which were prepared and submitted to the COI Secretariat.

#### *2.2.4 Shed light on gendered impact of the occupation through attended UN sessions*

WCLAC continued its active participation in the UN HRC sessions by making use of its ECOSOC consultative status to present evidence-based data on the gendered impact of Israeli occupation.

##### *Attend CSW sessions and carry out parallel events virtually*

WCLAC participated in the CSW 66<sup>th</sup> platform on Climate change. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 WCLAC delivered a pre-recorded oral statement on the Climate change and its impact on women under occupation within the framework of the Israeli apartheid regime.

WCLAC submitted and delivered the statement on behalf of the Palestinian Civil Coalition to UN Resolution 1325, which includes 13 Palestinian human rights and feminist organizations during the CSW66<sup>th</sup> session to shed light on the reality of Palestinian women under occupation, and the numerous and systematic environmental violations they are subjected to. The main points addressed in the statement tackled the impact of Israel's environmental violations on Palestinian people especially on women and girls. In addition to Israel's intentional destruction of Palestinian agricultural lands by using them as a dumping ground for military, industrial, nuclear and sewage waste, which cause serious pollution of air, soil and water, and exposes women and children to many diseases and health risks. In addition, military trainings and waste endangers the well-being and safety of Palestinians, amongst women and children. In the Gaza Strip, which has been besieged for nearly fifteen years, 95% of water is non-potable. Further, the occupying power sprays chemical pesticides and conducts military operations on Palestinian agricultural lands on the eastern borders of the Gaza Strip.

##### *Attend relevant UN sessions (Human Rights Council)*

During 2022 WCLAC participated virtually and submitted six oral interventions on different items during the 49<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (Feb 28 – April 1 2022), the 50<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (June 13 – July 7 2022) and the 51<sup>st</sup> Regular session of the Human Rights Council (12 September- 3 October).

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC delivered a joint oral statement through pre-recorded video on item (3) for Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. During the statement, WCLAC pointed out that Israel's policies of land confiscation, settlement expansion, exploitation and pillage of Palestinian natural resources, among other environmental violations, are meant to establish and maintain a regime of racial domination and oppression against the Palestinian people as a whole and ensure the denial of their right to self-determination. The statement also addressed that Israel's environmental violations adversely impact women and girls. The statement was co-sponsored by: Al-Haq, UN Habitat international, Miftah Link: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1o/k1oyv109p8>

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, WCLAC and Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre (JLAC) delivered a joint oral intervention through pre-recorded video on the impact of the re-enactment of the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order) that was first issued in 2003 and then renewed in March 2022. The statement addressed implications of such discriminatory law, in which imposes sweeping restrictions on Palestinian family unification, and affect tens of thousands of families.  
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1g/k1ggzvvgkx>

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC and Community Action Centre (CAC) delivered a joint intervention through pre-recorded video on item 7 General Debate (GD) on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. The statement demanded HRC member states to declare that the land title settlement in Eastern Jerusalem is a bold display of Israel's institutionalized regime of oppression and domination which is a clear manifestation of an "Apartheid" regime. The statement also concluded that Israel must immediately cease the implementation of the land title settlement in Eastern Jerusalem and cease the application of its domestic laws in the occupied Palestinian territory. Link:  
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1b8kp6zmv>

#### **50<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (June 13 – July 7)**

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC delivered an oral intervention during the 50<sup>th</sup> HRC session, on item 3 with Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

Throughout the statement WCLAC thanked the SR on her first report for addressing violence against indigenous women and girls. WCLAC urged her and the working group on discrimination against women to visit the oPt and consolidate efforts with other special procedures to highlight the adverse impact of Israel colonial occupation and apartheid regime on Palestinian women and girls. WCLAC also urged the Council's Expert Mechanism that was established to report on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to take into account the gendered-based violence of Israel's laws, policies and practices of forcible displacement enforced on the Palestinian population. WCLAC endorsed Al Haq's oral statement on item 2 for the Independent Commission of Inquiry's (CoI). The statement welcomed the CoI first [report](#) to the Human Rights Council and support its invaluable work in addressing the root causes of Israel's systematic racial discrimination and repression against the Palestinian people on both sides of the Green Line, which builds upon the findings of other UN bodies pertaining to Israel's systematic and structural discrimination against the Palestinian people amounting to apartheid. Finally, WCLAC endorsed MIFTAH's oral intervention of item 3 interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions.

#### **51<sup>st</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (12 September- 3 October)**

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC delivered an oral intervention through pre-recorded video on item 3 in an interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes. The statement focused on Israel authorization of the licenses of Israeli settlement industries operating in the OPT in clear infringement of

both human rights law and humanitarian law. The statement addressed that there are at least seven Israeli settler industrial zones in the West Bank. They are located illegally on Palestinian hilltops, and often leak industrial wastewater into Palestinian agricultural lands. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities reallocated a number of industrial polluting companies from Israel to areas on both sides of the Green Line including in illegal settlements in the West Bank. These factories emit and produces chemical waste that causes detrimental impact on Palestinian agricultural lands adjacent to the factory, on groundwater and on air-purity. Consequently, high rates of diseases, including respiratory diseases, eye infections, and cancer, are found among the Palestinian population. Women and children are disproportionately affected.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC delivered an oral intervention through a pre-recorded video on item 7. The intervention addressed the disproportionate impact of Israeli mass expulsion and appropriation of land in Masafer Yatta and East Jerusalem. As the women of Masafer Yatta have to safeguard their children and property from attacks during night raids or sudden attacks by nearby settlers. These leave women and children in a constant state of fear and inflict high levels of distress. Where in Jerusalem the Planning and Building Israeli Law has significantly increased the rate of house demolitions. It enabled a partial shift in power over planning decisions to a national body, with limited judicial intervention in demolition cases and increased imposition of high financial penalties.

### *2.2.6 Build capacities of women from Area C and near the Wall to present their stories on impact of Israeli violations on their rights to international delegations and other international platforms*

#### *Conduct three annual visits for marginalized areas*

The field visits with delegations from the EU countries provide an opportunity to present evidence-based data on the gendered impact of Israeli occupation. These visits also give the opportunity for women to present their own stories as right holders on the impact of Israeli violations to IHL on their daily lives. WCLAC and Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC) hosted a French Catholic Relief Delegation and organized a visit to Ein-Samia and Al-Ouja Bedouin Communities. These two locations are under the threat of forced mass expulsion. The field visit extended to Silwan and Al-Esawyeh as Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem where house demolitions and forced evictions are highly practiced.

WCLAC accompanied a Danish Delegation to the Northern Jordan Valley aimed at providing a first-hand exposure to Palestinian's life and struggles where gradual annexation is practiced. The visit focused on the impact of the occupation's discriminatory policies on women and girls in Aqaba village, Khirbet Al-Maleh, and Khirbet Al-Faresyeh. The delegation, which included a Member Parliament (Iskandar Sideeq) from the Green Party, met with women who are directly affected by Israeli military trainings, tent demolition/ house demolition threats, water control, the rapid establishment of illegal outposts, and settler-violence.

#### *Select 3 out of 10 women from friction areas to participate in meetings with international delegations*

WCLAC selected three women from H2 Area and two from the Jordan Valley to provide coaching on methods of presenting their stories on the impact of Israeli military measures on their lives. Coaching sessions were provided on human rights and international humanitarian law to raise women's understanding of their rights. This was followed by supporting them to present their own stories being under constant Israeli violations as rights holders.

One of these trained women from the H2 Area joined the international advocacy trip WCLAC to Brussels and Copenhagen, which aimed to highlight the impact Israeli violations of International Humanitarian Law on women. This woman presented her story on her daily suffering being a mother, a worker and human rights activist, with specific focus on and the impact of settlers' violence on her life.

Engaging women in international advocacy trips and meetings with delegations gives them the space to speak on their own behalf as rights holders on the direct impact of Israeli violations on their own lives. It also contributed to providing testimonies as evidence-based data.

### *2.2.7 Provide coaching sessions for field workers to document IHL violations*

#### *On-the-job training for field workers and accompanying them in the field (12 times a year)*

WCLAC carried out a field visit with one of the field-workers as an on the-job training on monitoring and documentation. The violations that were documented during the field visit include, Israeli forces restriction of movement and harassments in Al Lebban Al Sharkieh and Al Sawiyeh village near Nablus. Mostly girls and women's rights to safe access to education and rights to movement were immensely impacted.

WCLAC also carried out another on the-job training to a field-workers in Ein Samya Bedouin community near Kufr Malek Northern the WB. During the visit WCAC advocacy team monitored and documented the mass expulsion and land theft in Ein Samya Bedouin community, and its gendered-impact on women. One-woman testimony was on the control of water resources by Israeli forces which results in increasing expenses on water consumption and lack of sustainable water for personal, hygiene, and cattle use.

Finally, WCLAC carried out on the-job training to a field-workers in Masafer Yatta, southern Hebron. WCLAC monitored and documented cases of mass expulsion, forced displacement and land confiscation, focusing on the impact on women and girls.

### *2.3.4 Carry out media and advocacy campaigns as necessary*

WCLAC utilizes the media; especially social media to disseminate awareness and advocacy messages to influence policy and decision-making processes. Social media, in particular is used to reach out to a wide range of community groups through the Facebook page and the international community through Twitter.

WCLAC continued its a media advocacy campaigns to influence the doption of the Family Protection Bill. An extensive media campaign was conducted with Al Muntada for Combating Violence against Women through radio episodes and radio spots on the Family Protection, which were also promoted on the radio's social network pages reaching 300,000 persons.



and Sabah Additionally, Al-Muntada, with the support of WCLAC, implemented a protest in front of Palestinian Cabinet. More than 400 persons from member organizations, and women activist from northern and southern WB's Governorates participated in this protest calling for the adoption of the Family Protection Law. During this protest Al Muntada delivered a statement the adoption of the Family Protection Bill.

## Strategic goal 3: Increased social responsibility of the Palestinian community towards women rights and elimination of discrimination against them

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Through community mobilization program WCLAC aims at increasing the social responsibility of the Palestinian community towards women rights and the elimination of discrimination against them. Achieving this is through awareness raising, mainstreaming women rights, capacity building for women rights advocates, influencing community concepts and cultures and strengthening community engagement in issues related to women's rights. In specific, WCLAC aims to achieve this through increasing the awareness of local communities on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women; enhancing the capacities of community members and grassroots women organizations on women protection, empowerment and mobilizing the community members to initiate feminist and human rights discourse and strengthening the effective engagement in national, regional and international coalitions and networks

### *3.1. Awareness of local communities on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women is increased*

#### *3.1.1 Develop awareness raising material on GBV and women's social and legal rights through different media outlets*

In 2022, WCLAC developed the sexual harassment [study](#) (in Arabic) based a feminist human rights approach based mainly on a perspective that relies on the principle of justice and gender equality. This approach relies on the use of a qualitative method for the analysis of sexual harassment, focusing on the use of in-depth interviews with women and girls, who have experienced sexual harassment at different stages of their lives, including at work. Objectives of the study are mainly; shedding light on the issue of sexual harassment against women as one of the most important manifestations of discrimination and violence forms against them, and one of the most important obstacles impeding their equality. Shedding light on the economic, social and psychological effects and repercussions on women in particular and the society at large, as well

as impact on the development and progress of society. Reviewing the existing legal reality around this concept and how it is addressed in international and humanitarian treaties and charters, or in the regulations and laws in force in Palestine, in general, and in workplaces in particular. In addition to the comparative study between the legal reality in force in Palestine, and the laws and regulations of similar Arab countries in their general social context.

WCLAC produced a report on “Family rights for women in Jerusalem under Discriminatory Israeli’s policies” as part of a joint project with MIFTAH. This factsheet highlighted Israeli discriminatory and punitive measures against Palestinians in Jerusalem include the house arrest of minors, restrictions on freedom of movement, identity card revocation, forced evictions, house demolitions, and refusal of family unification applications. These measures disproportionately harm women who bear the greatest responsibility in caring for the family. Palestinian women living in Jerusalem may lose their residency permits obtained through the established family unification procedures. Palestinian women are prevented from living with their husbands in East Jerusalem if she holds a West Bank ID card. In cases of divorce, the woman may not be allowed to stay in Jerusalem and becomes vulnerable to losing custody of her children if they hold a Jerusalem ID.

### *3.1.2 Develop skills of political parties, professionals, CBOs on women’s rights and advocating for these rights*

WCLAC continued **raising the awareness activities of local communities** on gender and women’s rights. During the reporting period, WCLAC supported Al- Muntada to carry out a ToT program for representative members of Al Muntada to develop their capacities to design and carry out training sessions in their communities on the Family Protection Law, its principles, components and compliance with international conventions; especially CEDAW. This training aimed to expand the number of young advocates who advocate for the adoption of the Family Protection Bill. The training targeted 24 lawyers (32 females and 1 male) from Al Muntada member organizations. The lawyers discussed the discriminatory articles of Labor Law, the Penal Code, and the Personal Status Law, and shared their experience and knowledge as advocates at women's organization. The training also highlighted the facts and figures on violence and GBV in the Palestinian society and the impact of patriarchal norms on increasing GBV. A specific session focused on analysis of the main articles and principles of the last version of the Family Protection Bill. This gave the participants the opportunity to better understand the main components of the Bill, which can be utilized to respond to inquiries and clarifications from local community members.

WCLAC supported AL Muntada in targeting different municipalities in the West Bank (Nablus, Al Bierh, Salfit, Bethlehem municipalities) to develop the skills of their staff on the Family Protection Bill. Several coordination meetings carried out with the aforementioned municipalities where they expressed their interest to learn more about the Family Protection Law to serve as a reference for their constituencies on the importance of adopting the Bill. Accordingly, a series of sessions were carried out in response of the local communities’ requests to understand more about the Family Protection Bill attended by 214 persons

(202 females, 12 males) from the governorates of Nablus and Ramallah. . The sessions focused on the importance of the passing the law and further discussed its objectives and main articles. These awareness sessions enabled municipalities' members to better understand the main components of the Family Protection Bill and eliminated misconceptions that were produced through the counter campaigns led by some conservative groups.

### *3.1.3 Develop skills of university students on identifying and combating discrimination against women*

Building the capacities of university students aims to increase their knowledge and skills on women's rights and human rights. The program introduces university students to the principles of human rights and women's rights in international conventions and treaties and present a gender sensitive analysis of national laws. Ultimately, these students are equipped with necessary tools to promote women's rights and transfer their knowledge to their peers.

WCLAC continued its cooperation with Palestinian universities targeting youth students to develop their skills on identifying and combating discrimination against women, as wells as increase their knowledge on gender- based violence. Three Memorandum of standing were drafted with the Arab American University, Birzeit University and AL Quds Open University.

WCLAC carried out a training program entitled "Women's Rights, Human Rights" in cooperation with the Legal Clinic at the Arab American University. A total of 26 female students from the Faculty of Law have participated in this training. The training program focused on the concepts of gender and gender-based violence and the laws applicable in Palestine. Specific focus was on the Penal Code, the Personal Status Law and the Family Protection Bill highlighting the Palestine Authority's responsibilities and obligation to the International Conventions and Treaties.

Participant students in this training confirmed that they have gained new information and knowledge and changed existing misinformation they had; especially on the Personal Status Law and the Penal Code and the status of Palestinian women in both laws.

### *3.1.4 Implement raising awareness campaigns to inform about rights, available protection and in still culture of reporting gendered corruption including sextortion*

As part of its joint program with AMAN (NED: Women against Corruption) WCLAC developed and carried out awareness raising and advocacy campaigns on gender-based corruption. Specific focus during 2022 was on sextortion in the social and health sectors. Awareness campaigns were launched using social media aimed to highlight and promote the results of the study of **Preventive Measures to Prevent the Risk of Gender-Based Corruption in the Provision of Social Services**" which has been produced by an external consultant through the first year of NED "Thematic Programme "Civil Society Organizations as Actors of Governance and Development Work in the Field"

Further, during the International Women's Day 2022, WCLAC held a national event to launch a study of sexual harassment against women in the workplace between the absence of the legal text and the denial which was produced by WCLAC's researcher and legal consultant.

### *3.2. Capacities of community members and grassroots women organizations on women protection and empowerment are enhanced*

#### *3.2.1 Building the capacity of youth organizations adopt gender responsive and sensitive approach in their work and Form 2 local women's protection committees through them*

Partnership was developed with two youth CBOs to mobilize young men and engage them in promoting women's rights in their local communities. The two youth CBOs of

Nibras youth CBO, in Bethlehem and Seir youth forum in Hebron were supported through capacity building and coaching to mainstream gender in their activities. Through strategic plans that were developed for both youth CBOs, community and outreach plans were developed. Local Protection Committees were established at each youth CBO aimed at transferring their knowledge to their community members; especially men on gender and women's rights.



The committee members; especially male members expressed their commitment to become champions of change in their community and to work with other men to increase their awareness and engage them in the process of detecting and preventing GBV.

After being exposed to training and coaching the protection networks at the two youth CBOs conducted awareness raising sessions on gender and women's rights attended by 158 men.

The Protection Committee was also further engaged advocacy initiatives during the 16 Days of Activism after designing a comprehensive advocacy and awareness raising plan. The main aim of the initiative was to raise the awareness of men and young men

on GBV and engage them in local initiatives to create male catalysts of change. Three radio episodes were produced and broadcasted in local radio station in Hebron. Awareness sessions were designed and implements in Dar Salah/Bethlehem targeted 548 (537 males and 11 females) persons from the local community members and students focused on violence against women and electronic blackmailing as a

form of violence. Another workshop was held for 40 parents (11 females and 29 males) further discussed electronic blackmailing and necessary preventive measure to be taken by parent.

### *3.2.2 Develop the skills of Sharia lawyer trainees on court procedures and gender sensitive representation to better provide legal service for women*

During this reporting period, WCLAC completed 4 trainings for 85 Shari'a male and female lawyers' trainees (76 females and 9 males) between the age of 22-25 years old in Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem Governorates. The trainings focused on developing the knowledge of participant lawyer trainees on gender and women's rights and discrimination, the services provided to women, gender-based violence and the referral system, cases of marriage, related to contract terms and types, alimony and child custody, a theoretical explanation and the application of certain cases in working groups.

Given the specificity of the situation in Jerusalem, a specialized training program was developed to suit the needs of male and female trainee lawyers in Jerusalem, given the lack of training references and options available to Jerusalemite legal students, due to the specificity of the legal status of Jerusalem and the multiplicity of legal references, in addition to the difficulty of dealing with issues of different identities. WCLAC trained 20 Shari'a lawyers' trainees (4 males and 16 females). The training focused on the spatial and substantive jurisdiction of Sharia courts and their types, drafting legitimate lawsuits and the mechanism for responding to a list of lawsuits, summons and urgent requests, as well as discussing legal issues that are considered in Sharia courts and bringing judicial precedents.

### *3.2.3 Develop capacities of women activist to increase their awareness of their legal and social rights and to be catalyst of change in their local communities*

Investing in women activists through capacity building and coaching to transfer their knowledge to other women in their communities contributes to creating agents of change. Once being equipped with skills and knowledge; these women act as focal points for other women through awareness raising about their social and legal rights. They also refer women victims of GBV to service providers to support them access justice.

WCLAC conducted four training sessions attended by 34 women activists on gender, gender-based violence and women's rights.

Upon completion of the training session, these women conducted 40 awareness sessions attended by 612 (604 women and 8 men) participants. These sessions focused on gender-based violence, femicide, electronic blackmail, early marriage, custody, alimony, divorce, sexual harassment, marital disputes, family interference, and rights related to inheritance. Moreover, the activists also provided information about service providers who would provide social and legal services to women victims of GBV such as WCLAC and other institutions in the area.

### *3.2.4 Carry out strategic partnership with CBOs (Tubas, Al Najda) to build the capacity of women activists and local women's protection committees and organize awareness campaign in their local communities*

#### *Develop capacities of 20 female community activists on women's rights*

WCLAC continued its support to two of the partner women CBOs (Tubas Charitable Society, Al Najdeh) to mobilize their local community members to promote women's rights. As such, WCLAC trained 40 women activists from Tulkarem, Qalqiliya and Tubas on gender and women's rights. These women activists were then exposed by coaching sessions to design and carry out awareness sessions in their communities.

Accordingly, these activists conducted 25 awareness sessions in 19 villages in Tubas, Tulkarem and Qalqilia attended by 395 women and 15 men. The awareness sessions focused on gender-based violence, electronic blackmail, early marriage, and rights related to inheritance. The activists also presented the organizations that provide support and services to women victims of GBV such as Tubas Charitable Society and Al Najdah as well as WCLAC and other institutions.

#### *Support 4 protection committees to increase awareness of men in their local communities*

WCLAC supported two partner women CBOs of Tubas Charitable Society and Al Najdah to mobilize men and engage them in promoting women's rights. As such four protection committees were established from men within these communities and were exposed to capacity building and coaching to transfer their knowledge to other men.

Accordingly, four committees (Tulkarem, Tubas, Jenin and Qalqiliya) conducted 19 awareness sessions for 339 members of the local community; (159 men and 180 women). These sessions focused on gender, GBV, protection mechanisms within local communities, electronic blackmailing as a form of violence. This method of creating men agents of change created a venue for engaging other men through awareness raising which can create social change; especially social stereotypes on gender, GBV and gender roles.

### *3.2.5 Empower 7 Local community groups in 6 marginalized areas on (gender and corruption in service delivery, linkage between rights and corruption, advocacy, social accountability skills*

WCLAC has been implementing this intervention jointly with the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability – AMAN for two years. WCLAC implemented a number of activities aimed at creating a comprehensive national dialogue on the impact of corruption on the basis of gender and enhancing community participation in social accountability about the impact of corruption on women in providing services, strengthening the legal and institutional framework to address all forms of gender-based corruption in the public service and providing means of redress for it, in addition to mainstreaming anti-corruption in the



work strategies of civil society organizations and community-based organizations concerned with women's rights.

### ***Organize media awareness campaigns on the impact of corruption on women***

In the context of raising awareness about the impact of corruption on women, in addition to mobilizing support and advocacy in order to adopt measures that limit the impact of corruption on women, the focus this year was on corruption in the health sector, WCLAC produced a number of media materials that were published either through the means of communication social or traditional media. Where WCLAC designed three motion graphics that were published on social media platforms under the name of women against corruption in Arabic.<sup>47</sup>

This motion reached 310,000 viewers across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. WCLAC also produced two television episodes that were broadcast on Al-Fajr TV, the platforms of WCLAC and AMAN, where the two episodes discussed issues of gender-based corruption, policies to deal with this form of corruption, the extent of its spread, and how to deal with cases that occur. In addition, three radio spots were produced and broadcast to introduce gender-based corruption and limit its spread. The Spots focused on raising awareness of the forms of gender-based corruption and how to request legal assistance from WCLAC and AMAN.

### ***Improve Knowledge and awareness on gendered impact of corruption***



This year, WCLAC continued implementing awareness-raising campaigns and workshops about the impact of corruption on women, as it held awareness sessions targeting men and women (181 females and 24 males) from marginalized areas such as Rafat, Al-Jadira village, Aqabat Jabr camp, Al-Auja.

WCLAC also implemented a specialized training course on receiving complaints targeting female lawyers from the staff of WCLAC and its four grass-roots partner institutions (Tubas Charity Society, Al-Najdah Association, Jericho Women's Society and Nahdat Bint Al-Reef in Hebron), which aimed to enhance skills and

knowledge of Participants about receiving complaints/reports related to extortion and sexual exploitation, providing legal assistance and counselling to women who are victims of extortion and sexual exploitation.

### ***Organize national conferences to discuss the impact of corruption on service delivery.***

WCLAC organized an Annual National Conference entitled "The Impact of Gender Based Corruption in the Health Sector" in the West Bank was held on November 17<sup>th</sup> with the participation of more than 60

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/NEDWomenAgainstCorruption>



participants representing civil society organisations, feminist organizations, community based and grassroots organizations, academics, experts in the health sector, women activists, human rights' leaders



and youth volunteers' groups from different WB Governorates. The conference discussed certain policy papers and studies related to gender-based corruption in the provision of health services in Palestine.

WCLAC's note in the opening session shed light on the concept of gender-based corruption within the Palestinian context, and the need to devote the principles of combating corruption based on gender sensitive mechanism, which will provide women a better space to receive services, preserve their dignity, and improve the quality of services provided.

Studies and policy papers were presented during the conference focused on gender-based corruption in the health sector.

### *3.2.6 Build the capacity of volunteer groups in organizing community activities that contribute to the political, economic, social and legal empowerment of women, as well as opportunities for the exchange of best practices*

WCLAC believes that meaningful change in favour of women's rights begins at the grassroots level. For this reason, WCLAC works with volunteer clusters to advocate for legal and policy reform and to grow an awareness of women's rights in underserved and marginalised communities throughout the West Bank. Volunteer mobilisation also empowers women (as well as men who support women's rights) with skills to develop their capacities, self-esteem, social status and voice in the public sphere. WCLAC supports teams of volunteers working to promote women's rights across the West Bank. Volunteers – a mix of male and female young professionals, typically fresh graduates or university students – are handed with knowledge and information to organise and lead awareness-raising and advocacy events on women's rights in their local communities that contribute to the economic, legal, social and political empowerment of women and enable them to exchange experiences. These activities usually include information-sharing workshops on women's rights and gender issues, educational and recreational activities, and cultural events. Through this network of volunteers, WCLAC is able to extend its reach, bringing its vision to conservative isolated, hard-to-reach locations. WCLAC also believes in the importance of targeting male volunteers in its programmes, and indeed the number of male volunteers forms almost half of our total number of volunteers. WCLAC volunteers are highly committed and dedicated to furthering the vision and message of WCLAC.

Capacities of volunteer groups were developed through training sessions on advocacy and community initiatives. The training workshops presented basic concepts of influence and advocacy, strengthening the attitudes of the participants in the importance of lobbying and advocacy campaigns, providing participants with techniques and skills in planning lobbying and advocacy campaigns.

After completion of these training session, the two volunteer groups with provided with coaching to design and launch local initiatives in their communities. Accordingly, youth groups launched their local initiatives during the International Women's Day focusing on climate change theme. Awareness sessions were conducted in affected areas by Israeli measure in Area C booth in Heron and Qalqilia.

### *3.3. Mobilization of community members to initiate feminist and human rights discourse is initiated*

WCLAC started working on **creating thematic Hubs**, which is considered a new strategic component of social mobilization, aiming to mobilize community members as alliance and active agencies for change on issues related to gender and women's rights, to support women's active participation and leadership within the public sector, through organizing intellectual structured discussions on gender and women's rights.

Through the four professional hubs (journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders and political parties) WCLAC created initiated intelctual femenist discussion on issues that might have misconception within the society such as matrimonial rights and joint property, personal status rights, sexual harassment in the workplace, and the Family Protection Bill. .

A capacity buidlign programs was developed targeting 18 human rights defenders and women activists' hubs. The training sessions aimed at developing their skills on advocacy and lobbying and advocacy. This will support them to design advocacy and local initiatives in their communities to promote women's rights.

The other training targeted the journalists' hub aimed at building their capacities on gender sensitive journalism. The training focused on stereotyped images of both women and men in the media and mechanisms needed challenge existing patriarchal and cultural norms. Discussion emphasized the role of journalists to change these norms through presenting gender sensitive and gender responsive media products.

### 3.4. Effective engagement of in national, regional and international coalitions and networks is strengthened

#### 3.4.1 Engagement in active networks and coalitions to support women's rights

WCLAC works within networks and coalitions to target national, regional and international decision-makers in order to affect essential legal and policy changes for women in Palestine. Coalitions are comprised of civil society actors, representatives from governmental bodies, members of political parties and other decision-makers. WCLAC also incorporates representatives from its volunteer clusters into the coalitions, thereby bringing the voice of the Palestinian community to the decision-making level. Participation, in turn, empowers volunteers with invaluable advocacy skills. WCLAC is a member in numerous local and international coalitions and networks including: 1) *The National Committee for Women's Labour and a commitment in a periodic meetings*, 2) *NGO Forum on Violence Against Women (Al Muntada)*, 3) *SALMA Network against violence against women in the Arab world*, 4) *Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the Gender Working Group*, 5) *National Committee to Combat Violence Against Women*, 6) *National Committee of the Palestinian National Coalition on UN Resolution 1325*, 7) *Media and Rights Coalition to Ensure Implementation of Courts Decisions*, 8) *The Coalition on women with disability*, 9) *The Palestinian coalition on social, economic, and cultural rights (ADALA)*, 14) *Women Employment committee*, 10) *PNGO-Network*, 11) *FADA*, 12) *Arab Feminists CSOs*.

During this reporting period, WCLAC continued its work to advocate for better protection for women through the upcoming revision of the Family Protection Law. WCLAC as an NGO and part of **Al-Muntada Forum to Combat Violence against Women** contributed to investing collective efforts to review the family protection law and include our vision towards the law that we aspire to deal with GVB. Further, WCLAC initiated the process of reviving the national coalition on personal status law through the working on a policy paper that presented the law that Palestinians aspire for. Meeting and workshops revived this coalition and put the personal status law on the national agenda.

As an active member of the **Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network**, WCLAC participated in the periodic meeting of the Network in April where Human Rights updates were shared among the members and a special emphasis was given to the adopted criminal protection laws in each country, as well as the application of Council of Europe against Domestic Violence "Istanbul Convention", in terms of raising awareness on its importance and the adequacy of the domestic laws and legislations of each country with the Convention. Furthermore, focus was also given to evaluate the previous strategic plan of the Gender and Gender Working Group.

WCLAC has also been part of the discussion meetings on the strategic plan for the **gender group within the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network** and the future strategic plan for the Euro-Med Network. WCLAC is also an active member of the, **Palestine, Israel, and Palestinian PIP working group**. WCLAC participated in the periodic meeting of the working group in person in Berlin during November 2022. The meeting focused on recent political developments and the context of shrinking space. In addition, the members of the network discussed the updates on advocacy regarding Apartheid and recent developments,

as well as expanding the concept of Apartheid and its allocations to Palestinians citizens in Israel, and the effect of Apartheid on women and children

WCLAC continued to be an effective member of the **Higher Committee on UNSCR1325**, which was formulated based on a Cabinet decision and responsible for following up the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR1325. It is also an effective member of the **National Coalition on UNSCR1325**, which consists of representatives of CSOs and aims to engage civil society organizations in implementation of the NAP. WCLAC also contributes to implementation of the National Action Plan of UNSCR 1325 not only through its membership of the coalition but also through training and capacity building. WCLAC supported the Palestinian Women General Union to build capacities of its members in different governorates on UNSCR 1325 and methods to promote women, peace and security agenda as well as developing a training manual to be used for future training and advocacy activities.



WCLAC participated in the meeting of the **Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW** in occupied State of Palestine. WCLAC worked on supporting its members through training and information to better develop CEDAW shadow report, which contributed to influencing CEDAW Committee to adopt recommendations that were addressed to the PA to eliminate discrimination against women. WCLAC also plays an active role in the **Committee on Minimum Wage** to ensure having fair and equal wages for women. This Committee plays a significant role to affect labour policies and influence Ministry of Labour to modify employment policies in accordance with international conventions Palestine acceded.

During this year, and within the framework of WCLAC's action plan, on the project of the **Personal Status Coalition** supervised by WCLAC, a reference paper was prepared on the identity and form of the coalition and the general objectives of the coalition in addition to drafting the vision and mission for this coalition as well as the committees that will emerge from this coalition, such as the Media Committee, the Advocacy Committee, and the Legal Committee. It was agreed that a general conference would be held to address these issues.

WCLAC is also a member of the regional **Arab Feminist CSOs Network**, which has representatives from Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and other Arab countries. The main aim of this Network is to advocate for women's right within the region and influence change. Most recently, the Network engaged through research and webinars in discuss C190 and the impact of climate change on women in the region.

# Strategic goal 4: Develop institutional and human capacity in order to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of WCLAC

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## *4.1. Develop WCLAC policies and procedures*

### *4.1.1 Improve WCLAC policies, procedures and practices*

#### *Draft new policies and procedures*

WCLAC developed three new policies last year related to Child Safeguarding Policy, Anti-Corruption Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy were finalized and approved by WCLAC Board of Directors (September 2021). The Child Safeguarding Policy aims to provide guidelines to WCLAC and its employees with the aim to sustain a safe environment for the children they encounter during the activities and protect them from any harm. The Anti-Corruption policy aims to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, the policy provides guidelines to WCLAC's employees for their daily operations, providing the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any corrupt actions or practices. And finally, the Sexual Harassment policy aims to provide guidelines to WCLAC's employees with the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any harassment actions, discrimination as well as sexual exploitation and abuse of authority. WCLAC is committed to provide a safe environment for all employees free from discrimination on any ground and from harassment at work including sexual harassment.

In 2022 WCLAC finalized the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are based on the job descriptions of the employees and related tasks. These KPIs were used during the annual staff evaluation. This facilitated the evaluation process and created interactive discussion between the employee and direct supervisor. Positive feedback are received from the staff on this tool of evaluation.

## *4.2. Develop professional skills of WCLAC staff*

WCLAC has ongoing capacity building for its staff through an annual capacity building plan, which includes capacity building of staff, appraisal system and incentives policy based on staff evaluation, participation in local, regional and international learning opportunities, including conferences, workshops and trainings. In 2022, WCLAC allocated budget to ensure that the administrative staff gets equal opportunities for capacity building since most of the opportunities are programmatic. During these six months, 16 staff members benefitted from the capacity building trainings.

The units' managers were contacted in order to provide human resources with the training needs of their employees. Accordingly, a comprehensive training plan was built, which will be implemented over the course of 2021-2023, with the possibility of making adjustments based on specialization and functional difference

# Part III. Annex

## Tables for WCLAC's provided services

The following tables indicate the numbers of women that WCLAC has provided services to, in different categories:

**Table 1. Type of Service Provided**

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>South of the Pal. Territories</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Total</i>
Type of service	Legal and social	73	154	59	286
	Legal	29	61	7	97
	Social	25	0	2	27
	Total	127	215	68	410

**Table 2. Type of Case**

		<i>Number of cases</i>
Legal/social case	Marital obedience incl. housing	27
	Custody and visits	69
	<i>Nafaka</i> (alimony)	302
	<i>Mahr</i> (dowry)	18
	Divorce	142
	Rights issues	2
	Total	560

**Table 3. Social Indicators of Women Clients**

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>Hebron</i>	<i>Jericho</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>
Average family monthly income (NIS)	Less than 500	51%	2%	65%	61%	54%
	501 - 1000	0	0	0.5%	3%	0
	1001- 1500	1%	0	2%	10%	9%
	1501 - 2000	1%	0	0	0	4%
	2001- 2500	1%	0	1%	3%	4%
	2501- 3000	45%	98%	31%	13%	29%
	No income	1%	0	0.5%	10%	0

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>Hebron</i>	<i>Jericho</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>
Age	Under 15	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	16-20	4%	2%	9%	23%	1%
	21-25	12%	17%	28%	19%	12%
	26-35	37%	56%	38%	42%	40%
	36-40	23%	10%	8%	10%	17%
	40 and above	23%	15%	17%	6%	30%
	Unknown	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

		<i>Total from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Level of education	Unknown	0%
	No formal education	1%
	Elementary school	3%
	Primary school	12%
	Secondary school	41%
	Diploma	16%
	Higher education	27%

**Table 4. Source of Referral**

		<i>Total percentage from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Source of referral	Courts	34%
	People	8%
	MoSA	7%
	Other institutions	6%
	Lawyers	3%
	Women by themselves	41%
	Police	1%

**Table 5. Type of perpetrator**

		<i>South of the Pal. Territories</i>
Perpetrator	Father	1%
	Ex-husband	16%
	Husband's family/ relatives	1%
	Husband	78%
	Outside the family	1%
	Neighbours/ Friends	0
	Siblings	1%



Relatives	1%
Fiancé	1%

**Table 6. Social Status**

		<i>Total percentage from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Social Status	Single	3%
	Married	8%
	Divorced	17%
	Left the Marital House	61%
	Abandoned	8%
	Widowed	1%
	Engaged	2%

**Table 7. Geographical Distribution of Women Beneficiaries**

		<i>Total percentage from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Geographical Distribution	City	44%
	Town	22%
	Village	29%
	Refugee Camp	5%
	Community (Khirbeh)	0

**Table 8. How Did the Beneficiaries Know about WCLAC**

		<i>Total percentage from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Knowledge	Official and non-official Institutions	13%
	Awareness sessions	1%
	Referred from a previous beneficiary	10%
	She was a previous beneficiary	14%
	People	31%
	Media	1%
	Courts	25%



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WCLAC enjoys special consultative status with ECOSOC