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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

Written statement* submitted by Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Sexual Violence Against Palestinian Women in Israeli Detention

Ever since the beginning of the Israeli occupation Torture methods, both physical and psychological, have been systematically used against all detainees. These include beatings, stress positions, sleep deprivation, isolation, solitary confinement, exposure to the sounds of torture, medical neglect, verbal abuse, sexual violence and threats of sexual of it thereof, and threats against family members.

The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) has consistently documented instances of torture against Palestinian women. A significant increase in the detention and torture of Palestinian women in Israeli prisons has been observed by WCLAC, particularly following the election of the most recent far-right settler Israeli government. Nevertheless, since October 7th, 2023, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) carried out campaigns of violent arrests against Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories resulting in the detainment of over 10,000 Palestinians. These estimated numbers include men, 86 women, children as young as 12, and undetermined number from the Gaza Strip. 1()

WCLAC's field researchers conducted interviews with 18 women from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem who were detained after October 7th. Most of These women were subjected to several months of detention without any formal charges being filed against them, others were detained for shorter periods.

All interviewed women spoke of being subjected to severe cruelty, including torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, medical neglect, starvation, and various forms of sexual abuse, starting from the moment of arrest and continuing throughout their detention.

Despite their fear of retaliation, these women consented to sharing their experiences. Many of the women we interviewed, particularly in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, faced threats after their release. They regularly receive phone calls from Israeli commanders, warning them not to speak to the media about their detention conditions. One woman, K.J., (2) who was sexually assaulted in front of her husband to pressure him, was contacted by an IOF commander after she spoke to a news channel about the conditions of her arrest, the commander threatened to detain her again if she speaks out to anyone.

H.B.(3) , a 61-year-old woman, was re-detained and remains in prison as of the date of this submission. It is important to note that following her initial release, H.B. was very active in speaking out about the atrocities she and other women endured in Israeli prisons, including sexual torture.

- Threats of Rape and Sexual assault; all of the women interviewed stated that they were threatened with Rape, gang rape, and sexual assault on multiple occasions including their family members. Threats of insertion of objects inside the vagina and rectum.
- L.K (4) "I was taken in my pajamas, thrown down in a jeep on the floor, the whole way male soldiers kicked me on my behind repeatedly, I was screaming in agony and humiliation, when I got to a room a male soldier walked in and asked me how I would like to be raped by 20 soldiers? Two by two or one by one so each can take his turn" L.K was threatened with the rape of her daughter.
- H.J. (5) was threatened with rape by male soldier who arbitrarily detained her for hours. The soldier also threatened to rape her two young daughters, aged three and four, who were present at the time of her detention.
- R.O (6) said that "male soldier said that he will get me gang-raped and send photos to Alsinwar".
- Forced nudity as a form of torture; All interviewed 18 women described being forced to be completely nude multiple times a day, often in open areas visible to soldiers and other detainees. Several women also reported that these strip searches were conducted in the presence of other female detainees, who were forced to observe each other. The women were required to bend down, spread their legs, and endure further degrading procedures.

- L. K (4) a resident of Hebron West Bank; said that she was stripped completely naked even though she had her period on.
- F. B (11) a resident of a village in Ramallah, West Bank; stated “I was forced to strip naked, three female soldiers were in the room, they were checking my private parts with their eyes. I tried to hide myself I ran against the wall to cover myself, but the female soldier pulled me and made me stand in the middle of the room while they cursed and watched. She wanted me to repeat after her phrases in Hebrew. At first, I refused, so she hit me on the head with a bucket. Because of how much she hit me, and I refused, she threatened me by attempting to open the door and call the male soldiers to deal with me. I got scared and started repeating after her. A soldier started recording me on her phone.

Rape; Insertions of Objects in Genitalia

- R.O (8) from Herbon- West Bank said that: I was strip-searched three times every day. Female soldiers used to take me to a room with other women detainees. We were forced to fully undress and we were not allowed to close the door. These were their instructions. What was most disgusting and embarrassing was that I was forced to bow (bend forward) and then we were required to expose our buttocks for the female soldiers to stare at it every detail. I felt that these were deliberate movements with sexual connotations and a type of harassment because she intentionally placed the inspection device, which was like a stick, between my thighs on my genitalia and rubbed it back and forth with the intention of arousing me. However, I was fully aware that these were intentional movements. With the presence of other female detainees who were nude as well”.
- A.G (9) from the Gaza Strip stated: “the female soldiers threatened me with a gun and forced me to fully undress, then they proceeded to make bend and poked me with the searching device everywhere on my body, including in my genital area, my rectum, and my breasts”.

Beating on Genitalia and Molestation

A.T (10) Resident of Ramallah, West Bank stated: “The Interrogation was full of physical sexual harassment by the male officer. Then they threw me in a cell for hours without food or clothes. Two female soldiers would come to the cell approximately every three hours and force me to take off all my clothes. I begged them to let me stay in my underwear because I had my period, but they forced me to take off my underwear. They beat me brutally. A female soldier would hit me with her boots on my genitals repeatedly till I bled. After half an hour of beating, they would leave me without clothes and bleeding. All this while the cell door was open, and the male soldiers were walking in the corridors, watching and laughing”.

Concluding Remarks:

- The language used by IOF soldiers to threaten women with rape and sexual assault reveals their deep understanding of Palestinian culture, where sexual violence against women is considered taboo. They exploit this knowledge, knowing that women are less likely to report such incidents due to fears of backlash, shame, and victim-blaming.
- Women from East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank all reported experiencing similar methods of sexual torture, despite being detained in different prisons, in various locations, and by different brigades. Actions like getting beaten on genitals. This consistency suggests that a widespread directive has been issued to use sexual violence as a method of torture against Palestinian detainees, including both men and women.

Recommendations:

- Recognize that Israel has institutionalized the use of arbitrary detention, arrest, enforced disappearance, ill-treatment and torture, including sexual torture, of Palestinian residents of Gaza and, that these policies and practices amount to the genocidal act of “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group”;
- Publicly condemn sexual torture and inhumane and degrading treatment willingly inflicted by Israeli authorities and forces against Palestinian prisoners and detainees; urge them to immediately cease with such practices and to fully respect Israel’s obligations under international law.
- Exert meaningful pressure on Israeli authorities to grant access to legal representation and the ICRC to all Palestinian detainees and those forcibly disappeared to assess the conditions of detention.
- Push for sanctions for personnel involved in sexual violence against Palestinian detainees. Including Itamar ben Gvir being the Minister of National Security and in charge of detention centers.

1 www.Addameer.org

2 J.K interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 12 April Nablus

3 B.H interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 4 September Ramallah.

4 K.L (2024) interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 27 July. Hebron.

5 J.H (2024) interviewed by Fayza Abu shamsiya. 6 August. Hebron.

6 O.R interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 5 August. Hebron.

8 O.R interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 5 August Hebron.

9 G.A interviewed by Safad Qishawi.28 February Gaza.

10 T.A interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 20 May Ramallah.

(11) B.F interviewed by Nadwa Barghouthi. 21 June Ramallah -Dergsana village