THE EXPLOITATION OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN’S RIGHTS NGOs

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NGO MONITOR
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NGO Monitor’s mission is to provide information and analysis, promote accountability, and support discussion on the reports and activities of NGOs claiming to advance human rights and humanitarian agendas.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- European funders and multilateral organizations, such as the UN and EU, fund numerous Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the stated goal of improving gender equality and enhancing women’s rights. However, many groups that define themselves as “women’s rights NGOs” promote incitement, glorify violence, and advocate for a rejectonist and politicized narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

- The Palestinian NGO Code of Conduct Coalition—a network of five umbrella groups, together comprising the vast majority of active Palestinian civil society—compel women’s groups to follow an extreme agenda that forbids any normalization with Israel and discourages the adoption of “liberal” ideals. Women’s organizations are required to bind themselves to Palestinian national aspirations in order to gain intra-societal legitimacy and acceptance.

- This linkage relegates gender equality to the background and perpetuates a situation in which Palestinian women are subject to discrimination and denied access to justice, autonomy, personal security, economic rights, equal opportunity, and political rights and representation.

- Within this context, girls and women are taught to idolize female terrorists as role models, further encouraging women to participate in violence. For example, Ahed Tamimi—a Palestinian 17-year old who is on trial for assaulting an Israeli soldier, incitement to terror, and other charges—spoke at an event in the European Parliament where she idolized the female terrorist Leila Khaled. Khaled participated in armed hijackings of TWA Flight 840 in 1969 and El Al Flight 219 in 1970.

- The European-funded NGO Addameer co-produced a booklet featuring (among others) Rula Abu Duhou, current faculty member at Birzeit University’s Institute of Women Studies. Abu Duhou, a member of the PFLP terror organization, was convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years in jail for her participation in the murder of an Israeli civilian. After her release from prison, Duhou declared, “I’m not sorry for it... On the contrary, I’m proud. And I wish I could do more for my country.”

- Ilham Shaheen, a community organizer for the Community Action Centre (CAC)—an implementing partner in an NRC project that received over $4.5 million from the governments of the United Kingdom and Spain—supports and glorifies violence on social media. One image of a young woman carrying an assault rifle was emblazoned with the text, “I love the revolution! All the beautiful girls who join will be the noblest!”
INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), and various European governments provide funding and legitimacy to a plethora of Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated specifically to women’s issues such as political, civic, and economic rights, gender-based discrimination and violence, education, support, and women’s healthcare. The number of women’s organizations has steadily risen since the 1960s (see Appendix 1), and today, there are dozens of local Palestinian NGOs meant to serve the needs of women from various sectors of society. Some of the most prominent examples include the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Women’s Studies Centre, the Young Women’s Christian Association Palestine (YWCA), Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD), and the Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC). However, NGO Monitor research and analysis reveals that many of these organizations utilize their platform on women’s issues to promote politicized narratives that, in contravention to EU policy, are often rejectionist and violent, many times to the detriment of gender equality within Palestinian society. This trend can be largely attributed to a subordination of gender equality and/or female empowerment to Palestinian political agendas. This problematic phenomenon frequently leads to a disproportionate focus on Israel as the cause of gender inequality, while not paying adequate attention to internal, systemic practices within Palestinian society that are discriminatory against women. These include, but are not limited to, a biased legal system, inaccessible political hierarchy, and restrictive cultural traditions.

Moreover, political constraints and requirements imposed within Palestinian civil society further radicalize women’s groups, leading to instances of incitement to and glorification of violence, rejectionism, and anti-normalization. International funding entrenches this state of affairs, in which Palestinian women and their legitimate quest for equality remain both marginalized and stunted.

The following report begins with background on the situation of women and women’s groups within Palestinian society, and specifically within a highly restrictive and coercive civil space. In this context, an overview of Palestinian female role models, the vast majority of whom are celebrated for their participation in violent “resistance,” is presented. The report then reviews the role of the international community in perpetuating this state of affairs, whether through funding of radical Palestinian NGOs, or through granting international legitimacy to these groups in multilateral forums such as the UN.

PALESTINIAN WOMEN AND THE COERCIVE NATURE OF PALESTINIAN CIVIL SPACE

Palestinian women and their interest groups operate in a precarious space within larger Palestinian society. Pervasive and discriminatory patriarchal cultural traditions not only make gender equality a difficult issue to broach in society, but also permeate all aspects of life for women. This sentiment is echoed by a UN Women study in which the authors note, “The challenges and rights violations facing women and girls in the Arab region are many, including low political and economic participation, violence and discrimination grounded in deep-rooted inequalities and established systems of patriarchy.”
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This is demonstrated by the restrictive nature of personal and familial status laws; a very low labor participation rate of 19% (as opposed to 71% for men); a non-uniform legal system comprised of Sharia law and laws inherited from Egypt, Jordan, and Britain; and a corrupt and stagnant Palestinian Authority (PA) where women accounted only for 12.9% of parliamentarians in 2007 (the last time the Palestinian Legislative Council convened).

Similar to the discriminatory character of Palestinian society, Palestinian civil space displays many of the same features. As opposed to an arena that is meant to be neutral and foster civic participation, local Palestinian civil space is decidedly biased. In regards to Palestinian women’s groups, this is punctuated by the fact that some of the most prominent organizations, including those listed above, are members of the Code of Conduct Coalition. Moreover, this reality is exemplified by the 2016 “Support Statement of Palestinian Feminists in Palestine and Diaspora” which was signed by 108 leading female activists. The statement accuses Israel of “colonial and racist oppression”; “deplore[s] the colonial attitude inherent in some Israeli feminists’ request of us to sign a statement in favor of liberal ideals… and against the effective solidarity with the struggle for rights”; and “emphasize[s] that popular resistance movements, including the boycott movement, are feminist issues as well.”

Being beholden to the Coalition’s radical and politicized code of conduct—which requires all members to “be in line with the national agenda without any normalization activities with the occupier, neither at the political-security nor the cultural or developmental levels”—further binds women’s groups to Palestinian nationalistic campaigns. In effect, this reality prioritizes “national struggle” while relegating social change and equality for women to the background. This presents a major hindrance to gender equality in Palestinian society because it avoids targeting the aforementioned institutions that perpetuate such inequality (e.g. a biased legal system, inaccessible political hierarchy, and repressive cultural traditions).

Additionally, ostensible government support for gender equality issues buys the PA valuable international political capital while effectively preserving the gender status quo. This is exemplified by the accession of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the PA in April 2014. Despite garnering widespread praise for adopting an important international treaty meant to help foster gender equality, the PA has not made significant progress in actually implementing the treaty. According to a report by the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), all international human rights treaties signed by the PA, including CEDAW, are presented as non-obligatory “due to the non-existence of a legal framework that would regulate the merger of these treaties in the national legal system.” Jerusalem Appeal Court judge Ms. Amneh Hamarsheh summarized the PA’s empty accession of CEDAW well, stating, “CEDAW is but ink on paper.”

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1 A conglomerate comprised of five umbrella organizations, each boasting a member constituency of between 135-500 Palestinian NGOs. The main umbrella organizations are the NGO Development Center (NDC), the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), the Palestinian National Institute of NGOs (PNIN), the Palestine General Union of Charitable Societies, and the General Palestinian Union for NGOs (in Gaza).

2 An “ethical and behavioral standard” that all member NGOs must abide by in order to receive the benefits of representation through these umbrella organizations. The code obliges all members to “be in line with the national agenda without any normalization activities with the occupier, neither at the political-security nor the cultural or developmental levels.”
“STORIES OF WOMEN, IMPRISONMENT AND RESISTANCE”

In November 2016, Palestinian NGO Addameer, an affiliate of the PFLP terror group, produced a booklet, “For the Love of Palestine: Stories of Women, Imprisonment and Resistance,” together with another Palestinian NGO, Samidoun, stemming from the visit of a delegation of American activists to the West Bank and Israel. The booklet features the “stories” of a number of female Palestinian terrorists and employs extremely inflammatory rhetoric, representing another case of promoting poor role models for Palestinian women and girls. The introduction of the booklet notes that “The Palestinian mother loves her children very much, but you cannot believe how much she loves her homeland.”

Despite Addameer’s close links to the PFLP, the NGO is funded by European governments including Ireland, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (the latter four through the joint funding mechanism known as the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat). Addameer campaigns in support of Palestinians prisoners convicted of terror offenses, referring to them as “political prisoners” and altogether omitting the context of violence and terrorism. In addition to the organization’s close ties to the PFLP terror organization, Addameer is also an “executive member” of the PNGO network.

Examples provided in the booklet include:

- Rula Abu Duhou, current faculty member at Birzeit University’s Institute of Women Studies. Abu Duhou is listed as a lecturer and teaches a course on feminist political thought. Abu Duhou, a member of the PFLP, served nine years of a twenty-five year prison sentence for her role in the murder of an Israeli civilian. After her release, Duhou declared, “I’m not sorry for it... On the contrary, I’m proud. And I wish I could do more for my country” (emphasis added).

- The booklet praises her attempts at organizing other female prisoners to demand their release during negotiations surrounding the Oslo Accords (pp 5-6).

- Khalida Jarrar, a senior PFLP official and former executive director of Addameer. The booklet claims that “She was charged with... representing the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Most major Palestinian political parties are considered hostile and prohibited by the Israeli military occupation” (emphasis added). Beyond stating a blatant falsehood, the booklet fails to mention that the PFLP is designated a terrorist organization by the EU, US, Canada, and Israel. In 2015, Jarrar was indicted for various offenses, including active membership in a terrorist organization (the PFLP) and inciting violence through a call to kidnap Israeli soldiers. Jarrar accepted a plea bargain, was convicted on “one count of belonging to an illegal organization and another of incitement,” and received a 15-month prison sentence with an additional 10-month suspended sentence. She was released from prison on June 3, 2016. Jarrar was again arrested in July 2017, “following her involvement in promoting terrorist activity through the PFLP.”
Lina Jarbouni—an Israeli-Arab who was **sentenced to 17 years in prison in 2002 for aiding and abetting Islamic Jihad suicide bombings**—is described by Addameer as having been “arrested in 2002 at the age of 26 and interrogated, tortured, and abused for thirty days. She was sentenced to 17 years for ‘aiding the enemy,’ being actively involved in Palestinian resistance.” Other Palestinian NGOs such as the **Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)** similarly **claim** that Jarbouni—as of 2016—was “the longest serving Palestinian woman prisoner serving a 17-year sentence since 2002 for ‘aiding the enemy’—Palestinian resistance.”

**EUROPEAN FUNDING FOR GENDER INEQUALITY**

EU member states and other international donors provide funds not only to aid in the realization of important societal changes for the benefit of populations, but also as a means of promoting **international cultural relations**. The cultivation of such relations is meant to be a “considerable asset to promote cultural policies as drivers for peace and socio-economic development in third countries,” in order to advance “objectives to promote international peace and stability, safeguard diversity, and stimulate jobs and growth.”

Despite Palestinian inadequacies in regards to adopting universal values such as gender equality or human rights, European governments and international organizations continue to flood Palestinian NGOs with funds. Moreover, many of these organizations—some of whom are signatories to the “code of conduct” discussed above—even serve in official capacities with organizations such as the UN.

For example, leading member of the Code of Conduct Coalition, PNGO (see above), which counts thirteen women’s organizations among its members, is entrusted with the task of strengthening, coordinating, and networking “civil society” by a number of European governments, including the **EU** and **Norway**. Together with the **Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA)**, a European NGO network, PNGO also enjoys permanent representation in the UN’s Humanitarian Country Team, which coordinates all humanitarian aid in the West Bank and Gaza. This comes with a seat on the advisory board of the UN’s humanitarian emergency pooled fund, a position granting it decision-making power in selecting the fund’s beneficiaries. In 2017, **$3.1 million** of the fund’s allocations went to member organizations of either AIDA or PNGO—meaning that these two networks ensured that their own member NGOs received roughly 40% of the total funding ($7.9 million as of October 2017). This grants PNGO a significant amount of influence over Palestinian NGOs and their agendas. More importantly however, it also coerces its members—including its women’s organizations—to toe the line with an extreme political agenda, effectively marginalizing any moderate alternative voices.

Other times, European and international funders are simply unaware of where their funds are being used. For example, the Community Action Center (CAC) at Al-Quds University participated as an implementing partner in a project led by the **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** that received over $4.5 million from the governments of the **United Kingdom** and **Spain**. CAC retains employees such as Ilham Shaheen, a community organizer, who espouses extremist ideologies that support violence and terrorism on social media (see appendix). One image of a young woman wearing a checkered black and white headscarf and carrying an assault rifle was...
emblazoned with the text “I love the revolution! All the beautiful girls who join will be the noblest!” (NGO Monitor translation).

**INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMIZATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

Multilateral organizations such as the EU and UN also contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality within Palestinian society by collaborating with, encouraging, and lending an international platform to organizations and individuals who prioritize Palestinian political aspirations over gender equality and thus promote radical and/or violent agendas. As described in a report to the European Parliament (EP) by the EP Directorate General for Internal Policies, “Women’s empowerment in the Palestinian context and their struggle for equal rights is closely linked to their political and economic empowerment which can only be achieved by ending the Israeli occupation.”

On September 26, 2017, Addameer General Director Sahar Francis spoke at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels at an event titled “The Role of Women in the Palestinian Popular Struggle.” The event featured Leila Khaled, whose affiliation was listed as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and was organized by Unadikum³. During the event, Khaled was quoted comparing Israel to Nazi Germany, saying, “We now have some sections that are more racist than the Nazis themselves. The Zionist movement in fact has (sic) followed the pattern to the key.”

In addition to Addameer and the European Parliament, UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk labeled WCLAC fieldworker Manal Tamimi as a “human rights defender.” Tamimi frequently utilizes antisemitic and violent rhetoric and imagery on social media (see appendix III). In August 2015, Tamimi tweeted, “I do hate Israel, i (sic) wish a third Intifada (sic) coming soon and people rais (sic) up and kills all these zionist settlers everywhere.” Additionally, in an August 2014 interview, Tamimi reflected on the role of Palestinian women in the conflict, saying, “Palestinian women... are raising the new generation, they are putting the seeds of resistance... they grow up their children (sic) how to fight, how to be strong... even the men, they are getting their strength from women's strength.”

Far from condemning Tamimi, WCLAC filed a complaint to the UN over the “Frequent targeting of Palestinian human rights defender: Mrs. Manal Tamimi.” Following an official complaint sent by Anne Herzberg, Legal Advisor at NGO Monitor, and the subsequent intervention of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Tamimi was removed from the list.

WCLAC was granted official consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2005 and is accredited to act as a UN observer. WCLAC enjoys this official status while supporting violence and defending persons espousing violent and racist ideologies, such as Manal Tamimi.

In June 2017, United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Dubravka

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³ Spanish NGO named after a poem by the late Arab-Israeli politician Tawfiq Ziad—which claims that Ziad “died in an accident (suspected product of the Mossad).” (NGO Monitor translation)
Šimonović, presented her report and referred to a “clear linkage between the prolonged [Israeli] occupation and violence against [Palestinian] women.” Specifically, Šimonović highlighted the issue of the “gendered impact” of the conflict on Palestinian women and implied that Israeli policy is a major cause for domestic violence within Palestinian society. This echoes claims by Palestinian NGOs such as WCLAC and PASSIA, which in an August 2015 report asserted, “Violence against women is on a rise, inter alia, due to Palestinian men’s frustration which stems from the loss of their ability to provide and protect resulting from the dire economic conditions.” Šimonović provided no empirical information or statistics to back up her assertion.

Similarly, in December 2016, UN Women published a report “International Legal Accountability Mechanisms – Palestinian Women Living under Occupation.” The report, by UN Women Palestine and authored by Wendy Isaack (former Human Rights Specialist for UN Women Palestine and current Human Rights Watch employee) claims to show “the ways in which the Israeli occupation results in a wide array of human rights violations that have a significant impact on women and to consider international legal accountability mechanisms for redress.” However, the report suffers from several methodological flaws in that no empirical data or statistical information is presented to support the author’s claims. Additionally, the report relies heavily on highly politicized NGOs that offer unsubstantiated claims and display a blatant bias against Israel (see NGO Monitor’s report).

The report repeats the same patriarchal motif of prioritizing Palestinian nationalism before gender equality, thus granting legitimacy to a structural inequality in Palestinian society that relegates women’s issues to the background.

**PROBLEMATIC ROLE MODELS IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY**

The Palestinian elevation of the “resistance fighter” as hero steers women to adopt radical and violent roles. This phenomenon is reflected by the female Palestinian role models glorified by the Palestinian Authority (PA), international NGOs, and local women’s rights NGOs. For example,

- In a [speech before the European Parliament](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/arts/2017/09/ahed-tamimi-speaks-european-parliament/) in September 2017, 17 year old Ahed Tamimi—whose arrest on counts of assault and incitement to terror has since resulted in her celebration as an international icon—said, “I’m very proud to be here with Leila Khaled, the most important symbol of the Palestinian revolution and (sic) really represents Palestinian women and shows us how woman at all stages of the Palestinian struggle have been able to be an example of what can be done. There are many symbols, many Palestinian women who resist, who oppose, we have Leila Khaled. We appreciate all of these women because they show the perseverance, the resistance, this commitment of the cause and they are fantastic example for women in Palestine.” Leila Khaled is notorious for hijacking airliners and is a member of the PFLP, designated a terror organization by the [EU](https://www.euparl.europa.eu), [US](https://www.state.gov), [Canada](https://www.canada.ca), and [Israel](https://www.israel.org).

- The Palestinian NGO [Miftah](https://miftah.org/)—a group that claims to “disseminate the Palestinian narrative,” “influence policy and legislation,” and “achieve a more supportive policy environment for reform and democratization in Palestine”—described Wafa Idris, one of the first female Palestinian suicide bombers, as “the beginning of a string of
Palestinian women dedicated to sacrificing their lives for the cause.” Idris detonated herself on January 27, 2002, killing 81 year-old Pinhas Takatli and wounding 150 Israeli civilians. She is described as one of the “several young women” who “decided to join the ranks of the resistance movement.”

- In May 2017, the Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) inaugurated a youth center in the town of Burqa, near Nablus. The center is named after Dalal Mughrabi, a terrorist who in 1978 murdered 37 civilians, including 12 children. Funding for this building was provided by Norway, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Local Government. Both Norway and UN Women strongly condemned the use of their funding for this center, while Denmark – which provided funding to the NGO via the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat – pulled funding and demanded that WATC return the Danish aid.

- As uncovered by Palestinian Media Watch, on January 1, 2018, official Palestinian Authority TV aired a segment on the role of young people in the “Palestinian revolution.” The show’s guest was Madeline Manna, the coordinator of Fatah’s university student committee for women, known as “Sisters of Dalal” after Mughrabi. Manna said, “In the Palestinian universities, especially in the Fatah Shabiba [Student Movement], the female student committees were named after Martyr Dalal Mughrabi – Sisters of Dalal – after the Martyr who was the commander of 11 men. We learn leadership from her, and that women always lead… Dalal Mughrabi is a role model, like other heroic female Martyrs in Palestine. We draw willpower and determination from her, and perseverance and [the will to] continue this struggle.”

CONCLUSION

Women and women’s interest groups operate within a precarious position in Palestinian society. This reality does not seem entirely lost on European policy makers. In a report commissioned by the EU, the authors concluded that, “The EU must not lose sight of the fact that European activities in Palestine take place in a context that is not entirely in line with European values such as peace building, gender equality, democracy and human rights.” This conclusion is based on the finding that EU values of “peace-building, democracy, and gender equality” present “stumbling blocks” for Palestinian civil society.

However, until fundamental flaws are addressed, women will remain significantly disadvantaged and marginalized in Palestinian society in comparison to men. Consistent with figures from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the State of Palestine was ranked 114th out of 188 countries in regards to the 2015 Gender Inequality Index as well as the 2015 Gender Development Index (GDI). The GDI also demonstrated that the estimated gross national income per capita for Palestinian women was eight times less than it was for Palestinian men.

Palestinian civil space is heavily influenced by several large umbrella groups that require member organizations (numbering in the hundreds) to adhere to the so-called “Palestinian NGO Code of
The code, which calls for anti-normalization, rejectionism, and the prioritization of Palestinian aspirations for statehood over all other endeavors, results in women’s groups attaining a degree of internal legitimacy in Palestinian society, but renders them political projects that do not challenge the existing discriminatory status quo.

This phenomenon further perpetuates the conflict and results in girls and women being presented with poor role models, encouraging them to participate in violence.

This unfortunate state of affairs is only exacerbated by European and international funding. By providing an international platform to groups that adhere to the Palestinian NGO code of conduct and do nothing to work against domestic Palestinian discrimination, international funders are legitimizing the linkage of Palestinian national aspirations to gender equality, thus helping to relegate women’s issues in Palestinian society to the background. Additionally, by continuing to fund such groups, international funders are directly contributing to advancing agendas that run counter to European and Western values, especially as they relate to peace in the Middle East and a two-state framework.
1. General Union for Palestinian Women (1965)
2. WCLAC (1991)
4. The Union of Palestinian Women Committees (1980)
5. Federation of Palestinian Women Action Committee (1978)
8. Birzeit University Women’s Studies Center (1990)

4 It is important to note that the graph is not representative of all Palestinian women’s groups in Palestinian civil society, but rather a selection of groups that provide information about their founding. See Appendix I for data used in compiling graph.
11. WATC (1991)
12. Union of Voluntary Women’s Societies (1989)
15. Unified Women’s Council (1989)
17. Al-Najdeh Association for Women Development (1978)
18. PWWSD (1981)
20. Association of Women’s Action for Training and Rehabilitation (1994)
22. Women’s Studies Center (1989)
24. Women Against Violent (1992)
25. National Committee to Support Women in the Workforce (2011)
APPENDIX II: ILHAM SHAHEEN (COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER) SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES

“We are with the resistance”
(Source: Ilham Shaheen, Facebook, July 31, 2014:

No text; Hamas militants waving to young girls
(Source: Ilham Shaheen, Facebook, July 20, 2014:
“Remove the mourning picture and raise the picture of the resistance”
(Source: Ilham Shaheen, Facebook, July 3, 2014:
2207520000.1520407204.&type=3&theater

“I love the revolution! All the beautiful girls who join will be the noblest!”
(Source: Ilham Shaheen, Facebook, May 27, 2013:
2207520000.1520407364.&type=3&theater
Ilaham Shaheen meeting with Jihad Obeidi – According to the PFLP website, Jihad Obeidi was arrested in 1988 and served 25 years in prison.
(Source: Ilaham Shaheen, Facebook, May 27, 2013:
APPENDIX III: MANAL TAMIMI SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES

(Source: Manal Tamimi, Twitter, @screamingtamimi)