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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN:
REVIEW OF MAINSTREAMING IN THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Progress achieved in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women, in particular the items to be included on the agenda of the Commission. As regards documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, *inter alia*, that under item 3 (a) of the Commission's agenda a report of the Secretary-General on the measures taken and progress achieved in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. Reporting requirements contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203 and 51/69 request the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Conference in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.

3. The present report has been prepared in response to those two mandates. Given the need for integrated reporting, mandates contained in Commission resolution 39/5 on the preparation of a joint work plan between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat are reflected in section I of the present report. Section II of the report fulfils the reporting requirements of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women and Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned.

4. The Secretary-General, in his report on the implementation of the outcome of the Conference (A/51/322), noted the understanding of the Secretariat that the report requested in General Assembly resolution 50/203 would be provided on a rolling basis. While briefly summarizing results from previous intergovernmental meetings, new material would be added to each report. Therefore, the three separate reports to be submitted in the course of a year to the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism under the broader heading of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and mainstreaming of a gender perspective would be self-standing. The complete picture of relevant intergovernmental, national-level and United Nations system activities taking place over a year, however, can be obtained only by consulting all three reports.

5. A particular effort was to be made in those reports to provide information that was most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body in order to facilitate intergovernmental decision-making. Thus, the reports to the Commission on the Status of Women would emphasize efforts undertaken by the secretariat of the Commission in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and other follow-up activities. They would also cover inter-agency activities and provide an overview of national action and action by civil society. Bearing in mind the need for integrated reporting, information requested under long-standing mandates or particular resolutions would be incorporated into those reports.

6. The emphasis of the reports to the Economic and Social Council would be on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. Thus, they would focus on activities in the area of the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming by other bodies reporting to the Council, as well as at the inter-agency level, with a view to supporting the Council's responsibilities in system-wide coordination in mainstreaming of a gender perspective, a task requiring the Council's ongoing and long-term attention. The Commission secretariat is assessing opportunities for including an annual thematic focus as well into the reports to the Council in order to increase their overall usefulness for intergovernmental decision-making.

7. It is intended that the reports to the Assembly should contain information from all intergovernmental bodies and United Nations system entities not reporting to the Council, including information from specialized agencies and international financial institutions. An analysis of activities undertaken at the national level by non-governmental organizations and civil society would also be provided. The reports would contain a section on means of implementation at all levels, including human and resource needs. To the extent possible and practical, reports required under specific resolutions would also be included.

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by the organizations of the United Nations system

62. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission, at its forty-first session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

63. The Commission on the Status of Women, in accordance with paragraph 260 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,³ has continued to monitor the situation of Palestinian women and children. The Fourth World Conference on Women added a new dimension to that reporting when it endorsed the importance of integrating a gender perspective in all policies and programmes of the agencies and bodies of the United Nations system. With regard to the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the mainstreaming of a gender perspective would ensure that all actors involved in the monitoring of respect for human rights or in providing assistance to the Palestinian people will take a gender dimension into account when fulfilling their mandates or designing and implementing their programmes.

64. Recent social and economic developments that occurred in 1996 and that had a particular gender impact are described below. Emphasis is placed on selected new developments and trends that have not been reported previously (see E/CN.6/1995/8 and E/CN.6/1996/8).

1. Situation of Palestinian women

65. When reviewing the economic and social situation of Palestinian women and respect for human rights throughout 1996, the conditions of Palestinian women living in the Palestinian self-rule areas and in the occupied territories remain of particular concern. Life in the self-rule areas has continued to be affected by measures undertaken by the Israeli authorities, including various military and economic measures, that have had an impact on social and economic development. The West Bank and Gaza Strip were entirely sealed on several occasions in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel, thus preventing workers with valid permits from entering Israel and East Jerusalem. The economy remains dominated by the detrimental impact of the occupation, in particular the labour market imbalance (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12). As a result of the loss of employment in Israel and a decline in the trade flow caused by frequent and long-term closures, the real gross national product in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined 22.7 per cent between 1992 and 1996. The unemployment rate increased and income levels dropped. By mid-1996, the average unemployment rate was 29.2 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, nearly 60 per cent higher than at the end of 1995. The unemployment rate has been magnified by the effect of high population growth rates and the large number of young people entering the labour market every year. Since 1995, real wages have fallen about 20 per cent.⁴ The drop in household income was partly compensated by remittances from Palestinians abroad and by drawing on resources, such as savings.

66. The economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has exacerbated the hardship of many families, in particular households with low incomes or those headed by females. It is accepted that economic distortions tend to affect the poorest groups in society most. Owing to their economic and legal status, women are affected more severely than men.⁵ It was estimated that 40 to 42 per cent of the Arab residents of Jerusalem, for example, live below the poverty line (see A/51/99/Add.1). Women and children, especially female-headed households, are particularly exposed to poverty.

67. The economic pressure caused by the inability of the male income-earner to provide adequately for the household and the high unemployment rates among men have caused women and children to start looking for work to maintain family living levels. There is a reported increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of women in the paid labour force in 1996, whereas the male labour force grew by only 5.1 per cent over the same period. A survey also found a participation rate as high as 11.5 per cent for children, mainly boys, in the labour force, a rate that is even higher than that of women. The highest concentration of female labour is in the agriculture sector, in which 35 per cent of women work for low wages and with unfavourable working conditions. However, there is also a high concentration of female workers (32.5 per cent of all workers) in relatively well-paid professional, technical and clerical positions. It is possible that women's increased participation in the formal labour market will become a new trend in Palestinian economic and social development that therefore needs to be taken into account.⁶

68. During the period under review, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of movement, education, religion and expression, have been affected by various measures linked to occupation. Forms of collective punishment, such as the demolition or sealing of houses and rooms, imposition of curfews and the sealing off or closing of areas have been frequently reported, mostly in retaliation for attacks by suicide bombers (see A/51/99 and Add.1, 2 and 3). All population groups are affected by such measures, but some target women in particular. For example, since many Palestinian women work in the agricultural sector they are particularly affected by the land seizure, loss of water utilization and other economic and social repercussions of Israeli settlement (see A/51/135).

69. Another punishment that affects women was the confiscation of the identity cards of wives of Jerusalem residents who live abroad, and who under Israeli law lose their identity card if they leave the city for more than seven years (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 215). Civilians have been exposed to harassment and physical ill-treatment. Palestinians, including women in labour, have been reported to be denied access to medical treatment in specialized hospitals (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 167). It has also been noted that Palestinian women have been humiliated and harassed during raids on their homes. There have been continuing problems regarding Palestinian women detainees in Israeli prisons who have not yet been released in accordance with Israeli-Palestinian agreements (see A/51/99/Add.1, paras. 322 and 327).

70. The field of education continues to represent a major challenge to the Palestinian Authority and the donor community. With population growth for 1996 expected to be close to 6 per cent, the continuing provision of quality education for all boys and girls is of concern. It has been projected that 858 elementary schools and the same number of secondary schools would need to be built by the year 2000 to cater for the school-age population (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12, table IV-4). Frequent closures of the self-rule areas in 1996 have again prevented students and teachers from reaching their schools. As a result of those and similar measures during the Intifadah, which have been aggravated by conditions of overcrowding and lack of teaching materials, the educational achievements of Palestinians are jeopardized. Women and girls are being particularly affected, which has contributed to the fact that the illiteracy rate of Palestinian women remains higher than that of Palestinian men. In February 1996, the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics published the findings of a demographic survey conducted among 14,854 households in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem). According to the findings, 16 per cent of all residents aged over 15 were illiterate, with female illiteracy standing at 24 per cent (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 224).

71. According to UNICEF, health conditions and provision of health services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remain poor. The impact on the reproductive health of Palestinian women is of particular concern. Total fertility rates remain very high. For example, the average estimated total fertility rate for the period 1990-1995 in the Gaza Strip was 8.8 children per woman.⁷ Low age at marriage, short birth intervals and lack of education are factors responsible for the poor health of many Palestinian women, in particular refugee women, of whom many are anaemic.

72. It should be noted that Palestinian women maintain a high level of participation in non-governmental organizations and women's committees. Progress can be reported on the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority has set up an intergovernmental committee under the Gender Development and Planning Directorate of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. A non-governmental organizations committee has been formed under the General Union of Palestinian Women.

2. United Nations assistance to Palestinian women

73. In Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5, the Council urged organizations of the United Nations system, among others, to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women. During 1995-1996, a number of projects for Palestinian women were initiated and carried out by the United Nations system and bilateral donors, in close cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/58 H, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", a coordinated, integrated and targeted programme was elaborated and is being implemented under the leadership of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (see A/51/171). Activities for women have focused mainly on health and family planning, relief and social services, education and training, collection of statistics disaggregated by sex, and support for the national machinery for the advancement of women, including training on legal literacy and the enhancement of women's role in public life.

74. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to emphasize the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the Palestine refugee community in its operations. Some 3.31 million Palestinian refugees were registered with UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as of 30 June 1996, of whom women of reproductive age and children below the age of five comprised two thirds. UNRWA placed special emphasis on maternal and child-health care as an integral part of its regular programme. UNRWA increased its family-planning services in the Gaza Strip, offering services in 120 UNRWA health centres in 1996, up from 49 in 1992. A tripartite mission of UNRWA, UNFPA and the Palestinian Authority developed in October 1995 a strategic plan and operational framework for a women's health programme, covering reproductive health and family planning (see A/51/13).

75. Education and vocational training remain a field of major activities for UNRWA. Some 49.5 per cent of the total school population and half of the 12,000 teaching staff are female, making UNRWA schools one of the first in the Middle East to achieve gender equality. Eight vocational and technical training centres offer a wide range of courses at the post-preparatory and post-secondary level, and have enrolled 1,273 women in the total of 4,624 training places. Vocational training for women has been provided in typical female jobs, such as clothing production, hairdressing and beauty care. UNRWA seeks to raise the proportion of women trainees by expanding courses more likely to attract women, such as nursing, computer science and business and office practice. Out of 943 scholarships granted to refugee pupils, 437 or 46.3 per cent were awarded to women.

76. The UNRWA programme for women in development seeks to involve Palestinian refugee women in remunerative economic activity. Some 11,000 women received training in the production of goods or management of services, together with basic business skills. Some 1,089 women supporting 8,200 dependants participated in a solidarity-group lending programme that provided credit ranging from US\$ 330 to US\$ 8,000 for refugee women in microenterprises or working as street vendors. In UNRWA's small-scale enterprise programme, offering loans for capital investment to new and expanding enterprises and working capital to established enterprises ranging in value from US\$ 1,000 to US\$ 75,000, 10 per cent of the credits were given to women. Through its special hardship programme, UNRWA provided material and financial aid to refugee families who met the UNRWA criteria of being without a male adult medically fit to earn an income and without other financial support sufficient to cover basic needs, which represented 5.4 per cent of the registered refugee population.

77. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) gives assistance to Palestinian women within the framework of a UNDP-assisted project on capacity-building in agricultural policy analysis and planning, which was formulated in 1995. Gender issues are mainstreamed into the major components of the projects: policy advice, including the preparation of a gender-sensitive agricultural development strategy; training in policy analysis and planning; institutional support; and agricultural statistics and establishing a database. Of particular significance is the establishment of the Rural Development/ Advancement of Women Unit within the Department of Agricultural Policies and Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture.

78. The programme of technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the third largest in the United Nations system, following UNRWA and UNDP. The ILO activities for women have been carried out mainly as components of major ILO programmes. The Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin has developed a three-year programme for the socio-economic promotion of Palestinian women, focusing on the training of women for entrepreneurship. The ILO also carried out a study on gender and critical analysis of Palestinian law and practice regarding women workers, and organized a training course on the promotion of women worker's rights and equality in employment.

79. The World Health Organization (WHO) has conducted a situation analysis of women's health and development. It assisted the Ministry of Health and the coordination of various providers of women's health services within and outside the Ministry in preparing a strategic national plan on the role of women in health and development. Further areas of priority are primary health care, leadership training for nurses and nursing management, training on nutrition and provision of immunization.

80. UNICEF supports strategies that promote basic education for all, health promotion and empowerment of women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Priority was given to children in underprivileged communities, especially in the rural poor communities in the West Bank and in refugee camps, while building on the capacity of local institutions to address the needs of those children and focusing on the girl child. Gender issues were integrated into programming and training programmes. The Palestinian Authority received technical assistance in prioritizing issues in women's health. In cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF finalized a multiple indicator cluster survey to provide reliable data on the situation of Palestinian women and men. UNICEF provided support for capacity-building to

institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and considered the formulation of a national programme of action as an immediate goal so as to ensure political and social mobilization as well as long-term planning for children, in particular the girl child.

81. The UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) has implemented projects to foster and promote the full participation of Palestinian women in public life and in all aspects of Palestinian social and economic development. It has supported Palestinian women's initiatives through an extensive network of institutions, including the work of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling on gender sensitive amendments to legislation, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Elections awareness-raising campaign for rural women, and the work of the Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health. It has also encouraged activities that promote a positive representation of women in audio, visual and written media. Technical assistance and staff training was provided to several women's units within the ministries of the Palestinian Authority. In addition, UNDP/PAPP has enabled Palestinian women to participate in the Woman's Observer Mission to the Election in Nicaragua.

82. UNIFEM, through partnership with non-governmental and governmental organizations, works towards strengthening the role of Palestinian women in the economy, governance, conflict resolution and peace-building. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, a project entitled "Post-Beijing follow-up operation" has been launched in April 1996, also involving four other countries of the Western Asia region (Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen). UNIFEM's goal is to promote the implementation of the Platform for Action and to assist in defining national strategies for the advancement of women. It also intends to strengthen working relations between non-governmental organizations and Governments, and to consolidate coordination and networking among non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels. UNIFEM also carries out a project for the economic empowerment of women in Gaza, training women on how to start their own business and providing assistance for access to credit and business counselling services.

83. The World Food Programme (WFP) currently targets 6,600 households in the Gaza Strip registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs as hardship cases. The majority of those households are headed by women with a large number of dependants. WFP provides food assistance, pays special attention to primary health care, and supports two projects for pregnant women, nursing mothers and pre-school children. The programme distributes food aid as take-home family rations to encourage poor women to visit clinics and health centres operated by local non-governmental organizations.

84. UNFPA activities for Palestinian women have increased consistently since 1987, when small-scale maternal and child-health training and research was started. In 1995, UNFPA helped to establish a women's centre for reproductive health services, social assistance, legal counselling and community education in the Gaza Strip. As part of the reproductive health activities of the UNFPA Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (1996-1999) and in collaboration with WHO, support is provided to the establishment of the Women's Health and Development Department of the Ministry of Health. The projects involve, *inter alia*, training of the Department's staff on the management of reproductive health programmes, conducting research on policies, service delivery and socio-cultural aspects of reproductive health.

85. The World Bank, in its initial activities in the occupied territories, focused on emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation, and only incidentally on gender. In response to the deteriorating economic conditions, the World Bank's programme has concentrated primarily on short-term emergency assistance, with an emphasis on the rehabilitation of public works. As the Bank reports, future Bank-supported activities on strengthening civil society, education and health, will address gender issues. The Education and Health Rehabilitation Project (1995-1997) is of particular interest to women since it is rehabilitating and constructing schools for girls in Gaza. Women will also benefit from the rehabilitation of hospitals in Gaza. The Palestinian non-governmental organization project, proposed for early 1997, will seek to mobilize official and private donor funds to support the activities of non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. Although many non-governmental organization subprojects will be demand-driven, it is expected that many projects will target women's income-generating projects and mother and child-health services.

86. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in its 1996-1997 work programme, initiated a multidisciplinary activity assessing the role of non-governmental organizations in the occupied territories and the Palestinian self-rule areas. The project focuses on income-generation, agriculture, industry and other areas, and considers prospects for networking among non-governmental organizations. The Division for Palestinian Rights within the Department of Political Affairs and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in executing their programme of work, make efforts to highlight the situation of Palestinian women and children and to involve women in various aspects of their programmes, such as inviting Palestinian women to participate as panelists in non-governmental organization symposia and seminars, and in new training activities. In a follow-up activity to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development facilitated the participation of a Palestinian expert to its workshop on global information through computer networking technology, organized in New York in June 1996.

3. Conclusions

87. As regards United Nations assistance to Palestinian women, it is recommended that the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system continue to incorporate a gender perspective in their activities. A gender perspective should also be integrated into the monitoring of possible violations of women's human rights, notably the monitoring carried out by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and the Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. In the case of the Special Committee, for example, it would be desirable to achieve a better perspective on the violations of the human rights of women and their needs and concerns by inviting more women to give oral testimonials before the Committee.

88. Women's status and potential roles in socio-economic development, their needs and interests need to be systematically considered in the preparations of overall economic and social development plans for Palestine and the Occupied Territories. While the international donor community has made a commitment to empower Palestinian women and enhance their role in society, including in public life, in leadership positions and through income-generating projects and vocational training, when it comes to programmes for macroeconomic development and market economy, gender needs are not as fully addressed. Women's increasing role in the labour market must be taken into account on a more consistent basis.

B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned

89. A report on the implementation of Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken

hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned was requested by the Commission for its forty-first session. Consequently, the Commission secretariat requested information from relevant United Nations entities on the implementation of that resolution.

90. From the four responses received by the secretariat, it was clear that there was no systematic collection of data and information on the release of women and children taken hostage in various situations of conflict around the world.

91. UNHCR pointed out that the question fell within the competence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It also noted the difficulties in obtaining global figures since the circumstances of the detention and release of women and children hostages vary from situation to situation.

92. The Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat focused its response on the situation in Angola, Guatemala, Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina. With regard to the situation in Angola, the United Nations Angola Verification Mission reported that women and children were still being taken hostage and that it was currently examining petitions relating to 11 such cases arising from the first extraordinary session of the Joint Commission devoted to Human Rights, held on 8 May 1996, and from resolution 40/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women. Information on several United Nations peacekeeping missions indicated either that there was no knowledge of such cases (as in the case of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala) or that such cases were not formally registered (as in the case of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In cases of kidnapping in Bosnia and Herzegovina, immediate investigations are carried out by the United Nations International Police Task Force. No figures were submitted, however. It was noted that the kidnapping of women and children in Guatemala was related to profit rather than to the political situation.

93. In its response, UNICEF referred to the report prepared by the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Michel, on the impact of armed conflict on children, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157 (see A/51/306 and Add.1). Although the report gives extensive information on violations of the rights of women and children, it does not provide specific information pertinent to the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned.

94. With respect to the release of women and children taken hostage during armed conflicts and imprisoned, an important step for improving the situation would be for the Governments concerned to ratify without delay and to implement all relevant international instruments and Conventions, and for practical and cost-effective measures to be taken to collect information on women and children hostages on a systematic basis. Non-governmental organizations working in the field might also contribute to that effort.

Notes

¹ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 6 (E/1996/26), chap. IC, resolution 40/10, annex, para. 6.

² Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Central and Eastern Europe (Bucharest, 12-14 September 1996).

³ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

⁴ See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", Quarterly Report (Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories), Autumn 1996.

⁵ See World Bank, Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy (Washington, D.C., 1995).

⁶ See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", loc. cit.

⁷ See World Population Prospects, 1996 Revision, forthcoming United Nations publication.
