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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000, requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Similar mandates were also contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69, 52/100 and 53/120. The present report emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of gender mainstreaming and follow-up activities, including activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations, since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.6/2000/2).

The report on the joint work plan for the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is being submitted as a separate report.

I. 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 in the agenda of the Commission. With regard to documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, *inter alia*, that under item 3 (a) of the agenda of the Commission, a review by the Secretary-General of mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. In its resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Similar mandates were contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69, 52/100 and 53/120.

3. In each of the three reports submitted in the course of a year, the information that is most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body is provided. The report to the Commission on the Status of Women emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of gender mainstreaming and follow-up activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The report to the Economic and Social Council focuses on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. The report to the General Assembly contains information from all entities of the United

Nations system, including specialized agencies and international financial institutions, and an analysis of activities undertaken at the national level and by NGOs and other actors of civil society.

4. Section II of the present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 55/71. Section III responds to resolution 2000/23 of the Economic and Social Council on Palestinian women and to resolution 43/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned. The report of the Secretary-General on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan submitted in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/9 is before the Commission as an addendum to the present report (E/CN.6/2001/2/Add.1).

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III. Information supplied in accordance with specific mandates

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

72. In its [resolution 2000/23](#) of 28 July 2000, the Economic and Social Council requested a report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. The present report, which covers the period from September 1999 to September 2000, is based on information from United Nations bodies that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories and refugee camps. Such bodies include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories^{3/} and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. The report is also based on information submitted by entities of the United Nations system providing assistance to Palestinian people, i.e., ESCWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), ILO, the World Bank and UNICEF.

1. Situation of Palestinian women

73. In his report on the Palestinian economy, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories stated that, according to estimates from the Palestinian Ministry of Finance and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Palestinian economy improved in 1998: real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by about 7 per cent; Palestinian labour flows to Israel by 15 per cent; Israeli-Palestinian trade by 9 per cent. Donors' assistance increased by 12 per cent. In addition, the Palestinian Ministry of Finance and IMF revised their growth forecasts for 1999 upward to 6 per cent. In 1999, employment and labour force participation both increased so that the combined effect on the unemployment rate was a decline to 12.7 per cent from 15.6 per cent in 1998. ^{4/}

74. Women's employment and participation in the labour force grew faster than for men. This could be explained by the rapid expansion in the agriculture and services sectors, including public services, where women were present in high numbers.⁵ However, women were still found mainly in part-time jobs. In 1999, the proportion of women working less than 35 hours per week increased by 34.76 per cent while the same figure for men fell by 11.66 per cent. This tendency might have resulted from two factors. First, in the expanding agricultural sector women perform unpaid work, which is therefore not accounted for; secondly, married women tend to seek part-time jobs to increase the household income. Unemployment figures in 1999 suggest that the gap between women and men widened. In fact, while the number of unemployed men fell significantly — by 14.45 per cent — the number of unemployed women was nearly unchanged, falling only by 1.80 per cent. ^{5/}

75. In 1999 there was no reduction in the severity of the closure policy applied by Israel to the occupied territories. Personal mobility remained severely restricted as Palestinians could not travel freely between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or enter Jerusalem without permits from the Israeli authorities. Palestinian public agencies, businesses, NGOs and international agencies continued to experience higher transaction costs, time delays, and loss of productivity as a result of restrictions in the movement of personnel and goods at border crossings. ^{5/}

76. The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories ([A/55/373](#)) stated that closures and restrictions at checkpoints continued to remain a cause of concern to Palestinians. For instance, on 9 February 2000, Israeli soldiers raided a Palestinian house and held family members, including women and children, at gunpoint. One woman suffered a heart attack. As the car transporting her to the hospital was delayed at an Israeli checkpoint (*ibid.*, para. 84) she died.

77. The Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, Mr. Giorgio Giacomelli (Italy), in his report to the Commission on Human Rights stated that the Israeli policy of closures and permits also affected the right to education as it had serious repercussions for students in the Gaza Strip. In fact, more than 1,300 students from Gaza were prevented from studying at universities and Palestinian institutions of higher education in the West Bank because Israel considered them to be a security risk ([E/CN.4/2000/25](#), para. 47). In the same report, the Special Rapporteur noted that the issue of Palestinian prisoners detained in Israeli prisons remained a source of great concern. Although there had been releases of Palestinian (political) prisoners, within the framework of the peace agreements, the number remained high at 1,500. The conditions of detention were below international standards and difficulties of access to prisoners were faced by their lawyers as well as by their families.

78. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, reported that, in Ramallah, at various times, the General Security Service had banned parents, wives and siblings of 200 prisoners from visiting them (A/55/373, para. 114). The Special Committee also reported that the prison service had withheld permission for a British physician to examine the condition of a 16-year-old Palestinian girl detained in Ramle (*ibid.*, para. 110).

79. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, harsh prison sentences often had the effect of taking fathers away from children and, upon their release from prison, led to an incidence of violence in the family. As a consequence, in many cases, men lost their protective and breadwinner's role within the household while women were forced to take additional burdens and acquire roles other than the ones traditionally performed by them (see E/CN.4/2000/25, para. 43) in order to provide for all the economic and social needs of the family. It is important to note two aspects related to women taking on new roles: on the one hand, it might lead to conflicts within the family due to the difficulty in adapting to and accepting change; on the other, it might provide opportunities for women's empowerment as women gain new decision-making power within the household.

80. The expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolishing of Palestinian homes and the building of bypass roads in the occupied territories continued to create difficulties for the Palestinians. In particular, the demolishing of houses in Jerusalem often forced families to consider moving to the West Bank, where it would have been cheaper to buy or rent another house, but where they would have lost their residency rights. An incident of this kind was reported by the Special Committee (see A/55/373, para. 57).

81. The report of the Special Committee also stated that, according to the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health, the toxic gas pollution of the West Bank's water sources controlled by Israel, caused numerous miscarriages among Palestinian women (*ibid.*, para. 60) living in the West Bank.

82. As the present report covers the period September 1999 to September 2000, it does not contain information related to the effects of the violent confrontation between Palestinian civilians and Israeli security forces that erupted at the end of September 2000. Clashes spread provoking numerous deaths, particularly among Palestinian civilians, including youth. Such violence had negative economic and social effects in the occupied territories as well as serious repercussions on the peace process and on the ability of the organizations of the United Nations system to operate effectively in the occupied territories.

2. Assistance to Palestinian women

83. The organizations of the United Nations system continued to provide assistance to Palestinian people, in particular women.

84. During the period under review, ESCWA prepared a study on gender and citizenship and the role of NGOs in the occupied territories, aimed at proposing action-oriented policy recommendations to inculcate a gender-sensitive citizenship in post-conflict countries. ESCWA organized a workshop for producers and users of sex-disaggregated data in the occupied territories and started ongoing projects such as a database on Palestinian refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon; a regional household survey in the occupied territories; and the development of national gender statistics in the Arab countries, including the occupied territories.

85. UNRWA provides essential education, health, relief and social services to some 3.7 million registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations comprising Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Assistance to Palestinian women is a priority, delivered within the context of the Agency's regular programmes for Palestine refugees.

86. During the period under review, UNRWA began a review of its gender policies with external technical expertise and funding from the Government of Denmark. The review sought to align the Agency's gender policy and practice more closely with the framework and targets agreed at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and subsequently reviewed at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

87. In the 1999/2000 scholastic year, 468,651 pupils were enrolled in the Agency's elementary, preparatory and secondary schools, of whom 234,500, or 50 per cent, were female. Women accounted for 69 per cent of participants in UNRWA's pre- and in-service teacher training courses, and for 63 per cent of trainees in UNRWA's technical/semi-professional courses. Of the 673 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 1999/2000, 45.3 per cent were held by women. In addition, 14 Palestinian women in Lebanon would benefit from a scholarship project during 1999/2000 addressed to women only and managed by UNRWA on behalf of the Canadian International Development Research Centre.

88. UNRWA provided maternal and child health care and family planning services and sustained full immunization coverage to women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Those services were supported by school health services as well as by health educational programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

89. Difficult socio-economic conditions in refugee communities during the reporting period continued to create greater reliance on income earned by women. More than 50 per cent of UNRWA's special hardship case families, who received direct food and material assistance from the Agency, were headed by women. UNRWA's women-in-development programme provided a wide range of social, cultural and educational services at the community level. Seventy Women's Programme Centres served as focal points within the refugee community for UNRWA's work with women. From the beginning of 2000 until 30 July 2000, a total of 27,634 participants benefited from the various activities of the Centres, such as computer training, photography, English language courses, child care services for working women, group-guaranteed lending, awareness-raising campaigns on health, disability diagnosis and awareness and legal counselling. The Agency is currently reviewing the quality of training at the Centres, with the aim of facilitating employment of women upon graduation.

90. During 1999/2000, UNRWA's income generation programme granted loans valued at \$3.12 million to 3,716 women, who supported 20,050 dependants. Since 1994, the Solidarity Group Lending Programme has provided loans worth \$11.39 million to 15,183 women organized in 2,271 solidarity groups. These women were granted loans at the end of each successful repayment cycle. The programme was self-sufficient with all operational costs and loan loss provision covered from revenues generated by lending and banking activities. The programme maintained an annual repayment rate of 98.65 per cent.

91. During the period under review, the ILO Arab regional office undertook a series of activities in support and assistance to Palestinian women:

- *Gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Labour (Gaza and Ramallah)*

The inter-ministerial coordinating committee for the advancement of women mainstreamed gender concerns in certain ministries. In August 2000, the ILO supported a workshop, held in Ramallah, to develop an action plan for the Ministry of Labour.

- *Strategy formulation on the promotion and development of women's entrepreneurship*

Several activities were executed in the framework of a 1996-1999 training programme implemented by the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, Italy, to promote and develop Palestinian women's entrepreneurship. In particular, four courses to train trainers to develop technical capacities and nine technical workshops to enhance the knowledge and skills of women entrepreneurs were undertaken. In May 2000, a seminar comprising national governmental, non-governmental and private sector stakeholders was organized to design a national strategy for women's entrepreneurship development.

- *ILO multidisciplinary mission to the West Bank and Gaza*

From 31 January to 11 February 2000, the ILO developed two project proposals for the advancement of women. The first project aimed to strengthen the inter-ministerial committee for the advancement of women and the second to promote and develop female entrepreneurship.

- *Capacity-building programme on gender, poverty and employment*

In December 1999, a subregional planning seminar for the Arab States was organized in Beirut on an ILO capacity-building programme on gender, poverty and employment that resulted in national action plans. The action plan for West Bank and Gaza was developed into a draft project proposal early in 2000 and is expected to be developed further into a full-fledged project document.

92. In January 1999, the World Bank formally established a Consultative Council on Gender in the Middle East and North Africa Region in order to formulate solutions to the most pertinent gender concerns in the area. In the period under review, the World Bank undertook various assistance programmes and projects, including:

- *Comprehensive development framework*

A programme to address the increasing need for a holistic integrated approach to development balancing macroeconomic stability with human, social and structural elements.

- *The Second Committee development project*

A project designed and implemented with the full participation of women and included targeted interventions such as promoting women's centres and kindergartens.

- *The Palestinian NGO project*

A project which financially and technically supported NGOs that targeted the poor and marginalized Palestinian population, 70 per cent of whom were women.

- *The education and health rehabilitation project*

This project was completed in December 1999. It provided for appropriate and adequate sanitary facilities at school sites, promoted the development of teaching material free of gender bias, and aimed at increasing girls' access to schools.

- *The pilot training centre for disadvantaged youth*

Funded through the World Bank Development Market Place 2000 Competition, the centre would be created as part of a pilot project that targets poor rural young women and men who currently have no training skills useful in today's job market.

93. Based on its programme of cooperation with the Palestinian Authority for the years 1998-2000, UNICEF addresses gender issues through its programmes for Palestinian children and women.

94. UNICEF promotes advocacy for women's rights by increasing society's awareness of the scope and meaning of women's rights, non-discrimination and gender equality, using information from all its projects and education strategies, including better parenting, gender equity in education and life skills. The UNICEF strategy also supports an enabling environment that influences legislation and mobilizes resources for Palestinian women, in order to monitor and promote women's rights. Different types of media are used in pursuing that strategy, including television, radio, print media and theatre.

95. Within the women's health project, UNICEF supported the following activities aimed at improving the quality of life of Palestinian women:

- Eight-day training for 75 midwives from primary and secondary health care settings in the governmental sector as well as UNRWA and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society;

- Four-day workshop for 125 maternal care health professionals on the promotion of woman and child health and nutrition and the quality of services;
- Ten-day training for physicians and nurses within the obstetric and neonatal departments in four major hospitals;
- The maternal mortality survey being implemented in the West Bank, which would seek, inter alia, to identify the most common causes of maternal death, to strengthen the surveillance system in the country and to monitor the fate of orphans after the death of their mothers.

96. During the period under review, UNICEF supported a five-day training programme on first aid, health promotion, communication and leadership skills for 300 nursery teachers in 12 districts, undertaken within the better parenting initiative implemented with the Ministry of Social Affairs. UNICEF is currently supporting the following activities:

- A study on early marriage and dropouts in the Bethlehem district being conducted to understand the perception, attitude and practice related to early marriage, and to examine the relationship between early marriage and dropping out of school among females who marry early;
- An awareness-raising campaign on gender and development issues among students, grades 7 through 10, attending eight schools in the Bethlehem district;
- A review of new textbooks to assess whether they are gender sensitive. The results of the review would be shared with the Ministry of Education;
- Sixteen gender-training workshops targeting 400 education professionals in 8 districts (5 in the West Bank and 3 in Gaza). The training focuses on gender awareness and sensitization as well as on some basic skills to enable the education professionals to integrate gender into the teaching process.

97. Gender is mainstreamed in both projects of the advocacy and capacity-building programme: the planning, policy formulation and monitoring project and the children and women in need of special protection project. During the period under review, UNICEF worked on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey II (still to be completed) aimed at providing sex-disaggregated data on Palestinian children and women. Furthermore, UNICEF provided:

- Technical and financial support to the Palestinian Authority in drafting the Palestinian Child Rights Charter and ensuring that it was gender sensitive;
- Support to the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs in carrying out a study of orphanages providing long-term residential care with emphasis on the under-served girl child;
- Support to efforts aimed at increasing media coverage of Palestinian children and women, jointly with the Ministry of Information;
- Support to the creation of a network of NGOs working to combat violence against women.

3. Conclusions

98. In the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority, civil society groups and organizations of the United Nations system made considerable efforts to improve the economic and social conditions of Palestinian women. Yet, despite these efforts and in spite of the positive trends of the domestic Palestinian economy in the period under review, women still experienced unequal access to the labour market and income-generating activities and continued to have higher unemployment rates than men. Thus, the situation of women still requires special attention.

99. The status and living conditions of Palestinian women are linked to the achievement of progress in the peace process. Women living in the occupied territories continued to be directly affected by Israeli policies, especially the closure hindering the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, civil society groups and organizations of the United Nations aimed at advancing women.

100. Towards the end of the reporting period, violence between Israeli security forces and Palestinian civilians erupted in the occupied territories creating great concern as it jeopardized the peace process and hindered assistance efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system. It is important that United Nations entities continue to be able to operate in the occupied territories and that efforts are made to continue working for the advancement and empowerment of Palestinian women. It is particularly important that Palestinian women continue to be given assistance in areas such as education, health, social services and micro-credit and that efforts are made to increase their full and equal participation in decision-making and peace programmes.

101. The gender perspective should continue to be fully integrated in international assistance programmes, through inter alia, greater gender analysis and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, which is currently insufficient. Although the reports of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Territories, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967 all provided valuable information on the situation in the occupied territories, they still lack a thorough gender analysis. Thus, it is important to introduce a gender perspective in all studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations on the situation of Palestinian women.

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3/ In September 1999, the Secretary-General reconfigured the mandate of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. His title was changed to United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. In addition to his responsibilities relating to the occupied Palestinian territory, the Special Coordinator now also has responsibilities for coordinating United Nations development assistance related to the peace process in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic (A/55/137-E/2000/95, para. 2).

4/ See United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories report, Spring 2000, Executive Summary.

5/ Ibid.