



Restricted Lives:

Women's Voices Under Blockade in Gaza



Photo:
Halla Al-Safadi and Ahmad Zaqout

Story:
Halla Al-Safadi

Design:
Hisham Obaid

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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the Gaza Strip remains under 50 years of ongoing Israeli occupation and a decade-long blockade which have created a long-standing protection crisis affecting various aspects of the Palestinians' lives in Gaza. Palestinians in Gaza face continuous exposure to violence, denial of rights, restricted access to livelihoods, services and resources, and absence of protection and accountability for human rights violations.

The deepening of the internal Palestinian political divide and measures taken by the Palestinian Authority in 2017 had triggered further deterioration in Gaza's chronic energy crisis. It undermined the delivery of basic services, affecting major humanitarian sectors such as health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and food security and leading to further exacerbating the impact of the blockade on people's wellbeing, livelihood and protection. According to the UN Country team in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), Gaza's "livability" by the year 2020 remains in question.

Women and girls continue to experience multiple forms of violence, based on the continuing military occupation, human rights violations and a growing humanitarian crisis, compounded by conservative traditions and patriarchal norms. They are disproportionately affected by the humanitarian conditions which systemically create gender-based vulnerabilities. Following the 2014 hostilities in Gaza, women suffered large scale displacement. Precarious living conditions and overcrowding, particularly among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), along with the loss of productive assets, often led to the adoption of negative coping mechanisms, such as the rise of the dropout rate of children from school and early marriage of girls. The general decline in the access of people to basic services, especially water and electricity as a result of damages to infrastructure, has doubled the domestic burden for women and undermined their ability to engage in income generating activities or allocate time to tend to their own needs. The extensive damage to agricultural and grazing land over the course of hostilities has had a significant impact on the employment opportunities available to women who work in agriculture. Recent research has shown that women in Gaza have limited access to employment opportunities and sustainable income and are exposed to gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms; with particular groups of women facing more vulnerability than others such as women with disabilities, women heads of households, and widows.

Since 2013, UN Women has collaborated with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other humanitarian partners to facilitate a process for strengthening gender focus in humanitarian action in the oPt. The collaboration between UN Women and OCHA was solidified in 2015 with the formulation of a two-year joint action plan. In the framework of the plan, UN Women implemented the project “Engendering Humanitarian Action” which was generously funded by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). One of the objectives of the project was to build knowledge and deepen the understanding of gender-based vulnerabilities and the impact of conflict on women’s rights amongst humanitarian and development actors.

In this light, UN Women in cooperation with humanitarian sectors and clusters has developed a collection of women’s stories under blockade in Gaza. The stories aim to give a voice to women in Gaza who suffer the consequences of violence, poverty and limited access to services. The stories are collected to humanize women’s experiences and to depict the nature of their needs under each of the humanitarian sectors and clusters (Health, Education, Food Security, Shelter, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Protection). What the stories have collectively presented is how women’s lives intertwine with the political reality in Gaza, where the political violence becomes interconnected with domestic violence and deprivation of basic rights. The stories also depict how women face structural barriers in accessing services while their needs are complex and mounting in nature.

UN Women hopes that women’s voices will shape and inform the humanitarian response in the oPt to become more gender-sensitive and multi-sectoral, while also promoting the benefit and meaningful participation of Palestinian women and girls.

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Shelter Roofless

The door opened to a dark and tiny room with a ruined mattress covered with old and torn blankets. The corrugated tin roof failed in keeping out the chilliness of November, but at least could grant Shaheera a little privacy in her bedroom and bathroom. The rest of what she calls her house was roofless. In winter, rainwater fills the house, and in summer, the Mediterranean sun makes her house unbearable.

Through a hole in one of the unpainted walls, she exits from the bedroom to the kitchen and the bathroom. A horrible smell fills the air. On the floor, sewage water was leaking outside the bathroom. Broken pigeon and dove cages surrounded by flies and insects were placed right in front of the kitchen. Shaheera also raises ducks and hens in the very same place she lives in. Many however do not get to live long because of the rats and other rodents.

The forty-six-year old Shaheera was abandoned by her unemployed husband because she reported him to the police due to his continuous verbal and physical abuse soon after he married her as a second wife. He forced her to leave the apartment and move up to the roof. She has been living all alone on the rooftop. “I didn’t get a divorce because my family is very poor, and my father told me I couldn’t raise my son by myself. I love my son; for his sake, I was ready to bear a life no one can bear.” Her son, who is married and unemployed, is now 23 years.

“I didn’t get a divorce because my family is very poor, and my father told me I couldn’t raise my child by myself. I love my son. For his sake, I was ready to bear a life no one can bear.”

Shaheera fully depends on the assistance she gets from the Ministry of Social Affairs. She receives around \$50 a month as financial support, but such low income is not sufficient. While she was talking, Shaheera took off a piece of her Hijab that covered her neck and said, “Look! I am sick. I have thyroid hyperplasia; I will have to undergo surgery because I cannot afford buying medicine.” She paused for a moment and continued, “This is not a life. This is not a house. I just want a small room that is good enough to live in.

In Gaza, acutely-vulnerable families face concerns in accessing adequate shelter protection, with chronic housing shortages and the dire economic situation. Over 24,000 people have more than half of core minimum standards missing, raising a number of humanitarian health and protection concerns (including gender-related protection concerns) as a result of overcrowding, lack of privacy or security, unsafe conditions, and exposure to weather extremes. This figure includes 2,800 female-headed, divorced or widowed headed households, and 1,360 households with physically or mentally disabled heads of households.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018



Health and Nutrition

The Battles Against Cancer

In Gaza, cancer causes emotional damage to women way before it physically harms them. In Gaza, when a woman is first diagnosed with cancer, the medical concerns are the last to be thought about as she has to think of how she is viewed by a society which has decided that cancer is the end of her life. Before she comprehends the fact that she is a cancer patient, she is hit with realities that are exclusive to Gazans; closure of borders, pending Israeli permits, and absence of proper medical care for cancer patients in local hospitals. Those are some of what cancer patients in Gaza have to endure on a daily basis throughout their battle against cancer.

Though she has medical referral, Haneen has been denied access through Erez checkpoint since January 2017. She has not been granted a permit or given any reasons behind the denial.

Her current medical status would require an urgent intervention, yet all her attempts to cross the border to access treatment, which is not available in Gaza, are to no avail. “I have lost sight in one of my eyes. I have also lost my hair. Since I have been denied access, I have kept taking doses of specific kinds of strong pain relievers that do not interfere with my chronic asthma. I can’t even afford all my medications,” she explained as she was coughing.

Like many other women diagnosed with cancer, not only does Haneen have to endure the physical pain, but she also has to deal with judgement and misconceptions of people around her. Haneen’s husband abandoned her after her illness, and he now lives with his second wife. He stopped supporting her and their children financially. Since then, he only comes home to cause more troubles. “Whenever he comes home, he physically and verbally abuses me and my daughter. He refuses to hold any responsibility. He even hit my daughter when she asked him for university fees. My daughter dropped out of university because of him,” Haneen said.

“I get hurt whenever I remember how my husband tells people that he no longer needs me because I am a sick woman.”

Haneen explained that what hurts her the most is the fact that her cancer ended her marriage and broke the family. She clarified, “I get hurt whenever I remember how my husband tells people that he no longer needs me because I am a sick woman.” He is now living with his second wife who refuses to let him help Haneen or support her treatment. “His second wife keeps calling me names like ‘the bald woman’ or ‘the one-eyed woman’. It hurts deep inside that I have to put up with all these insults,” she added.

Haneen is one example of many women who consider the physical scar left on their bodies way simpler than the everlasting emotional scar. These strong women are facing three battles: a battle against cancer itself, a battle against the blockade that denies them the right to medical treatment, and a battle against the male-dominated society that labels and humiliates them.

Access to treatment for patients referred outside of Gaza and the West Bank is becoming increasingly restricted. The number of patients seeking permits to access healthcare outside the Gaza Strip has more than doubled since 2012, but approval rates through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing are dramatically declining, from 92.5 per cent in 2012 and 62.1 per cent in 2016, to 55 per cent in October 2017.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

A Leaky House

In Bait Hanoon, the thirty-three-year-old Najwa was waiting by an old rusty metal door. Her mother, Ameera, was leaning on a wall; eyes full of anguish. “I have been suffering from hearing impairment for 10 years now. It all happened after my husband physically abused me,” she commented. Since then, her eldest daughter, Najwa has helped her communicate with people.

Neither of the two seemed happy. Taking a look around was enough to at least understand one of the reasons why they do not feel safe. There was absolutely no sense of privacy in their house that only has a broken tin roof placed over two rooms and the bathroom. The house consists of five rooms: the first room is for sleeping and cooking, the second room is where they raise goats and pigeons, the third room is where they store the firewood Ameera collects with her donkey-cart, and the fourth room is the husband’s private room. “If we step in his part of the house, he creates us problems. We are scared of him. He even cut the power lines so that we won’t have any electricity at home because he does not want to pay the electricity bill,” Ameera explained with a sigh.

And then there is the last room which is kept for sleeping and taking showers. Mold, mildew, and algae covered the bathroom's walls and corners, and worms were coming out of the floor due to the sewage leakage in the bathroom. Najwa said: "We are scared to take a shower in the bathroom, it has no window glass. Our neighbors can easily see us; this is why we bathe in the bedroom." A black water container is placed on the tin roof above the bathroom. The non-filtered water they store inside is used for both drinking and cleaning.

On the other side of the house, an unstable table was placed by the wall next to a white and rusty refrigerator that does not work. For them, this was the kitchen. "We do not need a refrigerator; we do not actually have any food to store. I do not have a stove, so I use the firewood. We only have very few kitchen supplies; to be honest, we all share the same water glass. There is no need for a kitchen here," Ameera said. Ameera's family members developed different diseases owing to the lack of hygiene and clean food and water in their house. They frequently suffer from intestinal parasite, diarrhea, gastrointestinal diseases, and anemia. "There are a lot of insects and rats in the house. At night, we get bit. Sometimes the chicken we raise in the house get eaten by the rats," Najwa added.

**"We are scared to take a shower in the bathroom,
it has no window glass. Our neighbors can easily see us;
this is why we bathe in the bedroom."**

Yet the reason of their melancholy was not limited to the extremely poor conditions of the house. Najwa smiled and said: "Two of my brothers escaped the house because of him. He physically abused every one of us." She looked at her mom and added: "None of us went to university because he does not support us financially whereas he just got married to his second wife."

Her mother then interrupted with a deep sigh "I am bearing this horrible life just because of my children. Najwa is the person who helps me carry on."

All 2 million people in the Gaza Strip are negatively affected by the ongoing deficits and needs in the WASH sector. This includes 983,623 women and 991,428 children.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018



Education

A Bumpy Road

Amal means hope in Arabic, yet the 15-year old Amal seems to have lost hope in a better future ahead of her. Amal belongs to a family of ten. Her father used to work in Israel before the Israeli blockade was imposed on Gaza in 2006. He has been unemployed since. The family depends on charity to survive their everyday life.

Like many families in Gaza, Amal's family live considerably close to the Israeli border with Gaza. Her school is located in the access restricted area located in the Southern area of the Gaza Strip. This area lacks adequate infrastructure. No roads, sidewalks, street light, nor any means of public transportation is available there except for the unsafe auto rickshaw.

Eighteen students aged between six and fifteen ride on the very tiny back space of the auto rickshaw that looks like a prison cell. Some of the students fall out on the bumpy roads while the rest cling to each other to feel safe. To take the auto rickshaw to school, students have to pay around \$8 a month- but Amal cannot afford this. It takes her forty minutes to walk to school. When it is muddy and dark in the wee hours of the morning in winter, it takes longer and sometimes dogs attack her. This is not the only fear of Amal though. She also tells me that girls get verbally harassed by guys on their way to school. “More than three times, my family told me to quit school because of the long distance I have to walk. They are worried about me. I am worried, too. I understand they do not have money. I still go to school,” Amal commented.

Amal’s mother was sitting next to her. “I wish I could give Amal and her siblings a better life. I know she is not happy, and she always comes back home exhausted. She wants to be like the rest of the girls”, the mother said as her eyes were filled with tears. She then told me that Amal’s older sister who is now eighteen years old is already married and pregnant. “We encouraged her to get married when she was fifteen. We could not afford her expenses. At least now, I know she has a husband who takes care of that. I do not want Amal to get married for the same reason, yet if someone who can give her a better life proposes, she will get married as well. I know I am making a mistake, but I cannot help it.”

“More than three times, my family told me to quit school because of the long distance I have to walk. They are worried about me. I am worried, too. I still go to school.”

Acutely vulnerable communities resort to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour and forced marriage, disrupting the right to education for boys and girls. These communities include communities at risk of forcible transfer, IDPs, and food insecure households. School dropout rates are higher for boys than for girls, as adolescent boys are expected to contribute to household income in times of crises, with this being the main reason for boys to drop out. Early marriage for girls often entails their dropping out of schools either as a result of family pressure or due to school practices.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018



Food Security

The Land of Hope

On the way to her farm, the fifty-four-year old Fathiya Abu-Amra introduced herself as a woman who has a mind of her own. Her eyes and words are full of strength and hope. Three of her seven children are currently enrolled in universities despite the economic hardships the family is facing. "Many people tell me to stop my children's education because we cannot afford it. I was not able to complete my education; I will never do the same to my children. I borrow money and work in this farm to make sure they get a better life," she proudly said. Fathiya's husband used to work in Israel until the year 2000. Since then, he has been unemployed, and Fathiya became the sole breadwinner in the family. "My husband is my biggest supporter. He helps me in the land. He also supports my work which entails working late and being out of the house frequently. His relatives used to tell him that women should only stay home but he never listened!" she explained.

"I was not able to complete my education. I will never do the same to my children. I borrow money and work in this farm to make sure they get a better life."

With a big smile, Fathiya opened the farm's old gate and sat on a colorful and a timeworn rug and started explaining how this land is her life. The two-dunam* land was full of olive trees. On one side, she planted palm trees, and on the other side, she dedicated a small piece of her land for beekeeping. "My projects are all seasonal. During the olive season, I sell olives and olive oil. During the season of dates, I sell dates and Ajwa (date-paste). I also sell honey, and I try to make some products with the beeswax," she stated.

Fathiya's business flourishes during short seasons, but for the rest of the year, she finds herself forced to borrow money to cover her family's basic needs. This year, she had to borrow money to fix the irrigation system and buy items for her honey production as well.

"When I sell any of the products, I pay back my loans. With the rest of the money I buy food. I save up the money I get from the Ministry of Social Affairs for my children's university fees. I also rely on the assistance I get from UNRWA," she commented. Fathiya's annual income ranges between \$1000- \$2000 depending on how far she succeeds in selling her products. "Nowadays people do not buy huge amounts of food to store, and there are a lot of cheaper products in the market, but they are not as good as ours," she explained.

In her house, she cooks chicken on Fridays even if she has to borrow money. The rest of the week, her family eats beans and some vegetables they plant, but she only buys fruit during the seasons in which she makes money.

Fathiya seemed very satisfied with her life and full of hope for a better future. She dreams of starting a greenhouse in her land to generate more income and to have a better life for her family. She also hopes to use advanced equipment in her land and beekeeping project. To Fathiya, it is the little things in life that make her the person she is today.

"I might not have everything, but I know how to be happy. I don't care about what people say about me. I leave my house for hours to walk around. I take my family to the beach or to our land; we sit together and talk and laugh," Fathiya contentedly said.

The level of food insecurity remains particularly high in Gaza, an estimated 40 per cent of households are severely or moderately food insecure. In the Gaza Strip, 46 per cent of female-headed households are severely and moderately food insecure, while for male headed households it is 39 per cent.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018

* A dunam is the unit used to measure the areas of lands in Gaza. One dunam is 1,000 square metre



Protection

Thirty-Five Days

Early this year, Abeer, like many other women in Gaza, was involved in an arranged marriage. She got engaged for fourteen days before she got married. "He seemed to be a good man. He was talkative and full of energy. We have never thought that he was hiding behind a mask," Abeer's mother said. Two weeks into their marriage, Abeer's husband started to abuse her. He even used to beat her up with iron poles, plastic pipes, and bamboo sticks. Abeer gazed away and with an ironic smile she said, "He would beat me up until I faint. When I told him that I could not take any more beating, he had beaten me up even more. He used to shove his nails in my eyes until they became bloody red."

Her 30-year-old husband, who used to work as a PA Security Officer*, would physically abuse her and then force her into sexual intercourse. "He used to bring a girl to the house and spend hours with her in one of the rooms. I used to know that my husband is cheating on me, but I was helpless," she said. Due to her spouse's nonstop threats, Abeer was too scared to utter a word to her family.

* Palestinian Authority (PA) employees have not attended their work since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, but they continue to get paid by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Her last night at his house was very terrifying. He came back home while under the influence of drugs. Once he saw Abeer, he accused her of telling her sister-in-law that he beats her up. He then hysterically hit her until she passed out. When she woke up, he told her that he would continue what he started the next morning. "I was very scared of what he will do to me the next morning. Right before he woke up, I ran away," Abeer said. She could not take any of her belongings with her, not even her ID. She had less than a dollar with her. Once she arrived at her family's house, her father immediately encouraged her to go to the hospital and police. In the hospital, she was given a medical report that she then used to file a complaint against her abusive husband.

"I was very scared of what he will do to me the next morning. Right before he woke up, I ran away."

After a month, he was put in jail for domestic abuse. Abeer asks for divorce, but her husband refuses to divorce her as he does not want to pay her any money. In order for her to get a divorce, she has to give up on all the financial rights** the law grants her, yet Abeer refuses to do so.

Today, Abeer's husband is still detained for questioning. Abeer would only settle if he divorces her and pays her post-divorce financial dues (e.g. deferred portion of the dower). She is also waiting for the court's final decision to file for divorce. Abeer is currently unemployed and lives with her family. Legal fees for her case constitute a financial burden to her poor parents. "My daughters are all married; my 17-year old daughter is already pregnant, and my 16-year-old daughter is now married. It was hard enough to sustain them financially. We tried to lessen the burden by getting them married. Maybe Abeer would also get married again one day, but she keeps telling me that she hates all men now," Abeer's mother explains.

Thirty-five days was the entire period Abeer lived with her abusive husband, yet the psychological and emotional scars he has caused her might last for a lifetime. Abeer sighed deeply and said, "I suffered a lot. The marriage felt like thirty-five years, not thirty-five days."

The deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in the oPt and especially in Gaza has exacerbated GBV in all its forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence and forced marriage. Across the oPt, the GBV Sub-Cluster has identified gaps in integrated GBV prevention and response services, lack of awareness-raising interventions and a fragmented GBV referral system.

Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018

** In Gaza courts, a divorced woman receives a deferred dowry and the furniture that were agreed upon in the marriage contract.



Complex and Mounting Needs A Home in a Medical Center

Escaping from War to Blockade

They enjoyed a good life; their house was filled with love and joy. Amer Fora, who is a forty-year-old Palestinian-Syrian with a Syrian ID, used to work as a butcher while his wife, Kholoud Alhmoud, a thirty-eight-old Syrian, used to take care of their four children. Their life turned upside down after the civil war started in Syria. They found themselves doing all they could to escape the dreadful war. They ended up in Egypt with three options: they could take a boat to Europe and risk drowning in the Mediterranean, they could go to Libya that is suffering from political unrest, or head to the blockaded Gaza even though they do not hold a Palestinian ID. The last option seemed the safest to them since Amer's family is originally from Gaza. At that time, they did not realize the hardships of living under blockade.

The Absence of Needed Medical Care

A year after they arrived, the 2014 conflict began. This time, they could not escape. They evacuated their house in al-Shejaeya area to an UNRWA shelter until the conflict came to an end. Upon their return to their house and as Kholoud was cleaning the house, she felt an unusual pain in her hands that quickly spread to the rest of her arm. The doctors told her it was “a mere cold” that caused the pain. Soon after, Kholoud was not able to move neither her arms nor her legs. Several doctors failed to provide an accurate diagnosis and her medical conditions deteriorated. Later, she was finally diagnosed with a nerve disease that required immediate medical intervention which was not available in Gaza.

Israeli Medical Travel Permits

The fact that Kholoud and her family did not hold Palestinian IDs added more complications to the already complicated process of obtaining an Israeli travel permit. Whenever in need for medical referral outside Gaza, the International Committee of the Red Cross had to intervene to grant Kholoud a permit. However, none of her family members was allowed to accompany her as all did not have a Palestinian ID. Most of the times, Kholoud was transferred in an ambulance alone and had to undergo surgery without having her loved ones around her. “Last time she left Gaza for treatment, a neighbor volunteered to accompany her. Human Rights organizations had to intervene to make this happen though,” her husband said.

The Electricity Crisis

The nerve disease Kholoud suffers from got worse. She is no longer able to breathe nor swallow on her own, and can hardly speak. To survive, she needs nonstop support from the oxygen supplies run by electricity. Due to the Israeli blockade, Gazans suffer from long hours of electricity outages. “If the electricity goes off at home for a minute, Kholoud would die. I had to move her to Al-Wafa Medical Rehab Center because they operate electricity generators all the time. Her life depends on electricity,” Kholoud’s husband commented.

A Shelter in a Medical Rehabilitation Center

Kholoud’s husband, Amer, used to work as a waiter, but after his wife’s serious illness, he had to quit his job to help take care of his wife as he couldn’t afford hiring a nurse to watch after Kholoud. Al-Wafa Medical Rehab Center only provides them with a room with electricity. “I have been living with my two older sons in Kholoud’s room for three years now while my younger children are still living in the house in Shujaeya,” Amer said. He then explained that one of his biggest concerns is the diseases they get exposed to while living in a medical center. Kholoud’s room has turned into a shelter.

They cook, study, watch TV, sleep, and eat in the very same room. "I cannot leave her alone, and I cannot afford renting a house near the center," he added. The Ministry of health covers 75 per cent of the expenses of having Kholoud at the center, yet he cannot afford the remaining 25 per cent; he owes the hospital \$2000 so far. As all of the family members are unemployed, Amer fully depends on charity when it comes to buying his wife's medications or buying food for his family. Amer and Kholoud do not receive any help from UNRWA since they are not Palestinian refugees. "Two months ago, I had to sell our television because I had no money to buy Kholoud the medicine she needed," he commented.

The Children's Sacrifice

The children also had their share in Kholoud's story. Their oldest son dropped out of high school to help take care of his sick mother. The eighteen-year-old Dorgham also had to delay his senior year at high school to be able to help. "Both my father and I take care of my mother. I could not study last year because I live here. But I am back again to school this year," Dorgham commented as he was sitting next to his sick mother. Their only daughter got married after she graduated from high school. Her father did not want his daughter to spend years of her life in a room at the medical center especially since he couldn't afford sending her to university.

Unconditional Love and Support

"I hope to find treatment...I hope my children will live in a better situation," Kholoud said with a lot of difficulty. It is difficult to understand Kholoud's words, but her husband and son try to explain what she attempts to say. "Even though she is in a very critical condition, she is surrounded by her loved ones. Her husband dedicated himself to taking care of her," the nurse commented, holding Kholoud's hands. Her husband quickly looked his wife in the eyes and explained that this is the least he could do for his faithful wife who has always been with him through the good and bad. "I regret coming to Gaza. I did not know that living under blockade was more difficult than living in Syria. If I stayed there, at least my wife's family would have been able to see her."

"Even though she is in a very critical condition, she is surrounded by her loved ones. Her husband dedicated himself to taking care of her."

Note to reader: Kholoud Alhmoud has passed away 3 months after the interview.

Reflections from the Protection Cluster

The Protection Cluster considers the presented seven stories a clear reflection of the extreme vulnerability of women and girls and the humanitarian crisis disproportionate impact on them. The stories portray multiple layers of vulnerability in different sectors, and provide a snapshot of the patriarchal social norms that further deepen women's vulnerability in light of weak protection enforcement mechanisms and lack of functional network of services and safety nets.

Within the Multi-year humanitarian strategy, the Protection Cluster has set an objective namely, "Protection response mechanisms are in place to prevent and mitigate the effects of the occupation and conflict related violence". Within the humanitarian response, efforts will continue to further develop referral pathways and case management system linking women and girls to multi-sectoral services, and integrate quality assurance and feedback mechanisms into GBV response to ensure women participation and that their feedback reshapes and informs the design of services. While slight progress has been made in access to immediate health care for GBV survivors, gaps continue to exist to support women subject to violence or abuse in accessing other multi sectorial services. This includes access to shelter assistance and livelihood interventions. These two interventions are key to enabling GBV survivors to make informed decisions about their life and families. In this regard, protection and GBV mainstreaming in humanitarian response remains a cornerstone to ensuring that women and girls are met, and that they are empowered to claim their rights and seek justice and legal remedies. Also equally important is protection integrated humanitarian programming that presents opportunities to ensure that humanitarian interventions genuinely contribute to protection outcomes for affected communities.

Said Almadhoun

Protection Cluster Focal Point, Gaza Strip

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Epilogue

All the women I interviewed come from different backgrounds and geographical areas in Gaza. Their needs and sufferings are different yet similar! Five out of the seven women I met are abused by their husbands, yet refuse to seek divorce for fear that they would lose their children. Six out of the seven women are unemployed and hope to secure a decent income. All the women are deprived of their very basic human rights. I want to take the opportunity of this publication to thank all the courageous women who have shared their stories and life experiences with us.

Halla Al-Safadi

Journalist and UN Women Story Collection Consultant

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NOTES

UN Women Palestine Office

Jerusalem Office

Alami Building

Rosary Sisters School Street, Jerusalem

Tel: +972 (0)2 628 76 02

Fax: +972 (0)2 628 06 61

Gaza Office

UNDP Building

Ahmad Bin Abdel Aziz Street, Gaza

Tel: +972 (0)8 288 08 30

<http://palestine.unwomen.org>



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