

**The Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel**  
**مجموعة العمل حول وضع النساء الفلسطينة المواطنات في اسرائيل**  
**קבוצת העבודה בעניין מעמד האישה הפלסטינית בישראל**

---

**Statement by**  
**The Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel**  
**To the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**  
**On the Third Periodic Report from the Government of Israel**  
**July 5, 2005**

Madam Chair, thank you for giving us the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Abeer Baker, and I speak on behalf of the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, a coalition of six Palestinian women's and human rights NGOs inside Israel.

We would like to draw your attention to six main areas of concern that contribute to the perpetuation of systematic discrimination against Palestinian women citizens of Israel on the grounds of sex and ethnicity, namely: legislation, violence against women, participation in public life, education, employment, poverty.

### **1. Legislation**

With regard to Israel's obligations under Article 2 of the Convention, we would like to note that despite a previous concluding observation by the Committee, the right to equality is still not reflected in the Basic Laws of the country. The State's reference to the legal system's multilayered nature is no excuse for this omission. Neither has Israel made efforts to withdraw its reservations to CEDAW Articles 7(b) and 16, nor did it indicate its willingness to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. Furthermore, in line with concerns raised by other UN human rights treaty bodies, we call upon the Committee to strongly recommend the immediate revocation of the racist Nationality and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order), which denies spouses of Israeli citizens, who are residents of the occupied Palestinian territories, residency in Israel. This law has devastating effects on all persons concerned, particularly on Palestinian women on both sides of the Green Line, who are faced with the social and economic difficulties arising from the separation from their husbands, who are usually the primary or only breadwinners. In relation to Article 16 of the Convention and General Recommendation No. 21, the Age of Marriage Law, which sets the age of marriage at 17, needs to be amended by lifting the minimum age to 18, and it needs to be better enforced. The article of the Penal Code prohibiting polygamy is not consequently enforced, either.

### **2. Violence against Women**

The State of Israel provides insufficient support to Palestinian teenage women in distress. In 2003, the Ministry of Social Affairs closed the only state-funded secured shelter serving Palestinian teenage girls in danger of physical abuse, while it operates shelters for Jewish girls and boys and for Palestinian boys. After a petition by Palestinian NGOs, the Ministry assured the Court that a shelter would be opened. This has not yet happened. Therefore, we see the need to remind Israel of its obligation to offer such important service.

### **3. Participation in Public Life**

In violation of Article 7 of the Convention, Arab women remain heavily underrepresented in the public sphere and decision-making. Out of the 259 female judges in Israel only five are Palestinian, and while Jewish women make up for 64% of civil service employees, less than 2% of civil servants are Palestinian women. No Palestinian woman sits in the Knesset. With regard to these harsh discrepancies, temporary special measures need to be taken in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention, and the Committee's General Recommendation No. 25. In response to the Committee's List of Issues, Israel did not provide information on the existing laws on fair representation of the Arab population in civil service and boards

## The Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel

مجموعة العمل حول وضع النساء الفلسطينيات المواطنات في اسرائيل

קבוצת העבודה בעניין מעמד האישה הפלסטינית בישראל

of directors of government companies. The Working Group found that these laws are not being implemented.

### 4. Education

With respect to equal rights in education, Israel continues to disregard its obligations under Article 10 of the Convention. In 2000, the state spent more than three times more money on each Jewish pupil than on each Palestinian pupil. This discrimination in resource allocation results in second-rate education for Palestinian children, high drop-out rates especially among girls, out-dated schoolbooks containing gender stereotypes, a lack of counseling services, and failure to meet university entrance requirements. We would like to emphasize the necessity to recommend that needs-based budgets be allocated to the Arab education sector, and in addition, that temporary special measures and programs be implemented to close the huge gap in educational attainment levels of Palestinian girls and women. Moreover, affirmative action is needed to raise the number of Palestinian women in the academic staff, which currently stands at less than 1%.

### 5. Employment

In the field of employment, covered by Article 11 of the Convention, Arab women face serious obstacles as well. Only 17% of Palestinian women participate in the labor force as compared to 54% of Jewish women. It is Israel's responsibility to counteract the following aggravating factors: Apart from the lower level of education, Palestinian communities lack access to public transport, infrastructure, daycare facilities, and the long school day service. We request that the Government of Israel engages in a number of temporary special measures and programs to make the labor market accessible to Palestinian women by providing the lacking services.

### 6. Poverty

Israel did not respond to the Committee's inquiry about poverty among non-Jewish women. Here, I would like to note that no gender disaggregated statistics are available on poverty indicators concerning women, which is a shortcoming with respect to General Recommendation No. 9 of the Committee.

Finally, we would like to express our solidarity with all women citizens and residents of Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories and beyond, for universality is the very essence of CEDAW.

For details and further issues of concern, please refer to our Alternative Report on the Committee's List of Issues, which you received this morning. This statement does not refer to Israel's 4<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report; the Working Group was not made aware of its publication.

Now Hannan al-Sanna will speak on the particular problems faced by Palestinian Bedouin women in the Naqab.

Thank you.

**Adalah:** The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel – [www.adalah.org](http://www.adalah.org)

**Al-Tufula:** Pedagogical and Multipurpose Women's Center – [www.tufula.org](http://www.tufula.org)

**Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA)** – [www.arabhra.org](http://www.arabhra.org)

**Kayan:** A Feminist Organization – [www.kayan.org](http://www.kayan.org)

**Maan:** The Union of Bedouin Women's Organizations in the Negev

**Women against Violence (WAV)** – [www.wavo.org](http://www.wavo.org)