

## **Summary of the Study on Effect of the Siege on Palestinian Women in the Gaza Strip**

**Executive Summary of Study Commissioned By CFTA, and Undertaken by RAI Consult  
Gaza Strip, Palestine, 2014**

Despite the important role Palestinian women have been playing in the Palestinian struggle, standing side-by-side with Palestinian men in resisting the Israeli occupation, as individuals or within women's organizations, women still face harsh legal, social, economic and cultural realities. Because of the Israeli occupation, closure and blockade policy, women, along with other social categories, continue to face numerous problems. The living conditions of Palestinians have been progressively declining since the Israeli occupation placed Gaza Strip under siege, after Hamas had won the elections of 2006, in a clear act of collective punishment against Palestinians living there. The siege has been casting its dark shadows over conditions of women in the Gaza Strip, where the suffering of women is more severe, especially in daily living conditions and psychological aspects, culminating in threatening familial stability. Women shoulder the heavier burden and are the most affected, because of a chronic denial of their basic human, economic and social rights.

Economic, social and political conditions of women in the besieged Gaza Strip continue to be reported by local and international institutions. However, studying the effect of the siege on the different aspects of women's daily lives remains a concern of civil society organizations in general and women's organizations in particular.

This study by The Culture and Free Thought Association addresses the effect of the siege on the economic, social conditions and daily lives of women. The study compares conditions of women before and under siege and presents a number of recommendations for alleviating the impact of the siege on women, and intensifying pressures to end it. This study is also a continuation of an earlier study prepared by The Culture and Free Thought Association in 2012, entitled "Violence against Women as a Result of the Israeli Occupation in the Gaza Strip." The earlier study uncovered the suffering of women due to the siege, worsening human conditions, suspension of the supply of medicines and food, prolonged electricity outages, the denial of hundreds of patients from travel for treatment abroad and the resulting

death of many women or members of their families due to their inability to access essential healthcare services. .

The study targeted Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip between 18 and 59 years old. Descriptive analysis was used to deduce results. Research tools used included a sample–survey questionnaire distributed to a sample of women, selected through stratified random sampling. In the study design, the Gaza Strip was divided into five areas corresponding to the five governorates. The sample within each governorate was further divided to represent age distribution. The sample size was 304 women. In addition, 4 focus group discussions were held in different locations within the Gaza Strip, 5 interviews were held with experts and feminist activists and 7 case studies were developed.

**The most important conclusions of the study are:**

1. 79% of surveyed women said their economic conditions had become worse because of the siege; 49.2% said that the current economic conditions were worse than before, 30.2% said they were far worse, and 18.6% said there was no difference between condition before and during the siege.
2. 22.3% of women surveyed said at least one family member had lost his / her source of income because of the siege.
3. 39.9% of surveyed women reported seeking employment because of the siege. 61.3% said the direct reason for seeking employment was to improve the economic situation of the household; 13.4% said the direct reason was the unavailability of job opportunities for the husband / father, and only 6.7% said the reason was the desire to work and exercise the right to employment.
4. 70% of surveyed women said they resorted to several coping mechanisms to provide for their families. 18.6% said that the family bought on credit, 16.3% said that families borrowed from relatives and friends, 5.0% said their families borrowed from banks and 3.0% said their families used savings.
5. 19.7% of surveyed women said at least one of their sons had to quit school to work to provide for the family, and 9.9% said that at least one family member had to work in the tunnels because of the siege.

6. 60.6% of surveyed women who work said they had to accept worse working conditions because of the siege, such as longer working hours and/or lower pay. 46.4% said they contacted institutions to obtain financial or in-kind assistance.

7. 51.3% of surveyed women said they had to sell their personal belongings, such as gold jewelry, assets/real estate or other, because of the siege. 50.7% said the direct reason for selling assets was to provide for the household, 11.2% to restore homes, 7.2% to buy medical treatment, 6.6% to support schooling costs for one of their sons or daughters, and 5.3% to support the continuation of their own education.

8. 71.0% of surveyed women reported a change in social relations with family and neighbors because of the siege as a direct result of their economic conditions. 47.9% said that visits had become limited to close family. 34.7% said they had reduced social visits and 15.0% said they bought fewer presents for occasions.

9. 10.6% of surveyed women said they had to marry their daughters early (under 18 years of age) because of the siege and its direct impacts on economic conditions and social activities. 20.1% said they had to postpone marrying their sons and 5.6% said a divorce in the family had occurred because of the siege.

10. 31.5% of surveyed women said they faced problems in providing medications during the siege. 50% attributed this to the lack of medications at hospitals and public clinics, 37.8% attributed this to the lack of money to buy medications, while 12.2% said it was because of the lack of medications at private pharmacies.

11. The frequently reported psychological problems faced by the surveyed women during the siege were crying continuously without cause (28.9%), followed by feelings of desperation and frustration (23.5%), feelings of insecurity and fearfulness (22.9%).

12. 7.2% of surveyed women said they had taken tranquilizers before the siege. The rate of tranquilizer use has more than doubled during the siege, with 17.8% of surveyed women now reporting tranquilizer use.

13. 31.8% of surveyed women said at least one female family member showed a decline in school/university achievement. 27.6% said at least one of the women in the family discontinued their education because of the lack of money. 27.3% said

female university graduates in the family had not obtained their university graduation certificates because of the siege.

14. 76.5% of surveyed women said they had a problem with providing water for domestic use. 46.4% said they faced a problem with providing potable water. 77.1% of surveyed women postponed domestic chores until water was available. 46.1% said that water shortages affected cleanliness of homes, and 30.0% reported reduced bathing of family members because of water shortages.

15. 89.4% of surveyed women said that electricity availability was either worse or far worse than before the siege. 69.3% of surveyed women said that they postponed conducting domestic chores when water and electricity were not available. 51.7% of surveyed women said that they changed the time they carried out their domestic chores. 41.0% said they exerted more effort to carry out domestic work, either because of postponing duties or because of doing them without electricity, such as manual washing of clothes and using the butane oven and manual utensils rather than the electric equipment to make bread. 39.3% of surveyed women said that electricity outages resulted in them spending more time doing domestic chores, such as cooking, doing the laundry, and ironing.

16. 38.1% of surveyed women said that they or a member of their family had problems regarding travel and departure from the Gaza Strip. 46.3% said the ban on travel had a direct negative impact on health. 16.4% said the negative impact was on education, in the form of delays in enrollment in educational institutions abroad. 14.9% of surveyed women said that they or one their family members, who had been refused departure resulted in the loss of employment opportunities abroad for themselves or one of their family members.

### **Recommendations**

- Continue to organize popular and international campaigns demanding an end to the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip.
- Press the Egyptian Government to reopen the Rafah border crossing, in full, as it is the only port that connects Gaza Strip to the rest of the world, and to facilitate movement of Palestinians through Egyptian border points and airports.
- Expose the crimes of the Israeli occupation against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip through all means and media, encourage international rights

organizations to contribute to monitoring of Israeli violations, Demand that the international community meet its moral and legal obligations under international law by ending its complicity in the ongoing siege and the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian lands and its associated regimes which continue in clear violation of Palestinians' most basic human rights and pressuring Israel to recognize Palestinians' right to self-determination beginning with an immediate end to the siege and the lifting of all movement and access restrictions on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

- Continue to organize lobbying campaigns to pressure Palestinian, Decision makers, in order to guarantee the realization of national reconciliation.
- There is a need for immediate action by the governments in Gaza and West Bank to end the electricity crisis, ensure the neutrality of public services away from political conflict, put an end to the suffering of civilians, and work on establishing sustainable and strategic solutions safeguarding citizens' basic rights and requirements for decent living.
- Solidify networking, coordination and integration amongst civil society organizations, for immediate action toward developing sustainable and strategic solutions providing for citizens' needs, and ensuring the protection of their lives and the respect for their basic rights.
- Speed up the amendment of the Jordanian Personal Status Law number 61 of year 1976 and the Egyptian Family Law of year 1954, so as to have a unified Personal Status Law that is in accordance with international standards and agreements, in addition to the Penal Law, which ensures the protection of women from violence.
- Strengthen efforts exerted by CSOs to empower women and support their role in Palestinian society as real partners in development.
- Activate coordination and networking with women, local and legal organizations working on the protection of women from violence.
- Provide comprehensive and quality healthcare to marginalized women.
- Develop national economic policies, to be responsive to gender issues, to stimulate entry of women into the formal economy, and strengthen women's rights and participation in the labor market.
- Continue to strengthen and develop awareness programs for the different social segments of women and men, aiming at increasing society's

awareness of women's rights, and contributing to the eradication of legal illiteracy among women.

- Continue to provide psycho-social support programs to different social segments, especially women and children, to reduce the stresses to which they subjected due to siege and deteriorating conditions in the Gaza Strip.
- Expand legal services and legal aid provided to women, and strengthening and ensure the continuity of work in the legal clinics spread in different areas in the Gaza Strip.
- Design of projects to improve the economic conditions of women, and train them professionally, to open up the market for them.
- Widen the scope of Arab and international relationships to exchange experiences and improve professional performance in support of women's issues.
- Give attention to conducting gender studies and research to discern the reality of women's conditions in all fields, so as to support laying out of plans to assist, support and develop women toward participation in development.
- Call on international and donor agencies to continue to provide food and cash assistance and continue to support relief and development projects as long as the siege on Gaza continues.
- Activate media in all its forms, to support women's issues and expose crimes perpetrated against them by the occupation and shed light on their suffering, especially with regard to violence against them in private and public spheres, and bring to bear the real and honorable role of Palestinian women in confronting the siege and maintaining familial lives.
- Strengthen programs and projects that support the participation of women in social and political life and in decision making.