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**INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER
PERSPECTIVE**

**Written statement* submitted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, a non-
governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2006]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) wishes to express grave concern at the serious position of Palestinian civilian women, who continue to suffer disproportionately under the belligerent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an occupation which violates international law.

Palestinian women suffer the full range of human rights violations perpetrated by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), including collective punishment, extra-judicial executions, excessive and disproportionate use of force, willful killings, house demolitions and land razing. The effects of these violations is heightened by the fact that women are considered to be the primary care givers in Palestinian society and, as such, are responsible for all issues relating to the home, as well as the care of children, the elderly and the infirm. The serious nature of the daily humanitarian issues that arise as a result of occupation policies, means that women's own needs are either ignored or set aside as a direct result of the occupation.

Impacts of Violence

Women continue to be the victims of excessive and disproportionate use of force by IOF. Throughout the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, between September 2000 and December 2005, 106 Palestinian women were killed by IOF (this figure does not include female children). In addition, women have suffered the loss of family members, including husbands and children, who have been killed at the hands of IOF. While men are considered to be the primary breadwinners in Palestinian society, the killing, injury or imprisonment of a male member of the family (particularly the husband or father) has placed this responsibility on many women, who have been forced to provide for the family economically as a result. In addition, the death of a child has a particular impact on mothers and with 651 children killed since September 2000 (46 killed in 2005), this has added greatly to the suffering of Palestinian women.

Palestinian women suffer routine intimidation and harassment by IOF at military checkpoints. Such treatment can include being subjected to public strip searches, as well as enduring verbal abuse and threats of both a physical and sexual nature. The recent installation of new x-ray machines at Erez Checkpoint in the Gaza Strip presents a new violation of women's personal privacy.

Women are also particularly vulnerable during military incursions into civilian areas and often come under direct threat, when houses are taken over by the Israeli military. Apart from the obvious physical threat to women's lives during such operations, they also have a tremendous psychological impact, both on the women themselves and also on the families they care for.

Movement Restrictions

Freedom of movement is clearly protected under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities within, to and from the OPT, prevent Palestinians from realising their rights to work, family, health and education. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel, as the occupying power, must ensure the social and physical well-being of the civilian population under its control, including allowing them the right to leave the occupied territory.

There are a total of 376 military checkpoints and obstacles in the West Bank¹, which separate it into isolated areas and restrict movement between these areas. “Flying” or spontaneous checkpoints are becoming increasingly common, with an average of 118 in place in January 2006². Palestinians wishing to travel between different areas must obtain permits in order to do so and the construction of the Annexation Wall has caused further deterioration to freedom of movement within the West Bank. The Wall has in fact divided many women from their relatives and communities, in addition to separating them from workplaces, educational services and health services. Many women in the West Bank must also endure curfews, which are often imposed by the Israeli military during military incursions into residential areas.

Women in the Gaza Strip suffer from particular restrictions on external movement from the area. The Gaza Strip has only one entry/ exit point to the outside world – the Rafah international crossing point – and this has been repeatedly closed for long periods in 2005, effectively turning the area into a large prison. (Rafah crossing was completely closed for 80 days prior to and during the Disengagement Process in 2005.) Women in Gaza also encounter difficulties in obtaining permits to enter Israel or the West Bank through Erez checkpoint and permit applications are often unsuccessful. This is despite the fact that some applications involve women who are in need of urgent medical care in Israel or the West Bank.

These restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities completely disregard the rights of Palestinians and particularly affect women in relation to their right to education, work and their right to health.

Movement restrictions impact women’s ability to access educational facilities and places of work. Female students and teachers are disproportionately affected by roadblocks and checkpoints, which are imposed throughout the West Bank. IOF regularly harass and injure Palestinian women, who often decide not to go to school out of fear of continued harassment from settlers or soldiers. The construction of the Annexation Wall has further exacerbated this situation, in many cases cutting women off totally from their schools and places of work.

In addition, permit restrictions prevent many Palestinian women from accessing third level institutions, both in the West Bank and abroad. In Gaza for example, closure of the Rafah crossing has created severe difficulties for students studying abroad, while unsuccessful permit applications prevent Gazan women from studying in West Bank universities.

Since the outbreak of the *Intifada* in September 2000, there has been a continuous decline in women’s access to healthcare, which is directly linked to the heavy restrictions on their freedom of movement. This has had a severe impact on women’s health, particularly in relation to their reproductive health. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that from the start of the *Intifada* up to April 2005, 69 Palestinian women gave birth at checkpoints, due to delays or prohibition on travel to medical facilities (many of these resulted in the children being stillborn). There has also been a dramatic rise in the number of home births (a 10-fold increase during the first two

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), August 2005.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 9 February 2006

years of the *Intifada*) and a decrease in the numbers receiving pre-natal care (a 5fold decrease). The inability of women to access specialized care, particularly during emergency situations, puts their health severely at risk and significantly adds to the psychological trauma experienced by women.

Marriage Restrictions and Issues of Identity Cards

The *Nationality and Entry into Israel Law*, passed by the Knesset in July 2003, is a racist law designed to prevent family unification when one spouse is a Palestinian and a resident of the OPT. It suspends the procedures whereby a resident of the OPT who marries either a Jerusalemite or Israeli citizen can eventually gain either permanent residency status or citizenship, respectively. This law does not apply to Israeli settlers living (illegally under international law) in the OPT.

The effects of the law are both wide spread and devastating. Many women have to live outside of occupied East Jerusalem in order to maintain family unity. However, they also have to continue to rent an apartment and pay taxes in Jerusalem in order to prove that the city is their “centre of life”, thus permitting them to keep their Jerusalem Identity Card (ID). The Jerusalem ID bestows certain privileges on the holder including travel, health and social security benefits – losing it will result in the loss of these benefits and will leave them without any nationality. The divisions created between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank by the construction of the Annexation Wall have exacerbated issues relating to identity further and many families are now divided as a result.

In addition, children born to women in the OPT can no longer be automatically registered in East Jerusalem, even if the mother holds residency there. If the children remain unregistered after the age of 12, the child may no longer live in Jerusalem or Israel with its mother, thus breaking the family unity and causing enormous suffering.

Despite Israel’s justification for this law, as motivated by “security concerns”, it is clear that the intention is to maintain the ethnic integrity of the Jewish state, while substantially affecting the character of the areas in Jerusalem occupied in 1967, and so contravening international humanitarian law.

Israeli and International Obligations

PCHR is particularly concerned at all of the above measures, which disproportionately and directly affect women, who represent half the population of the OPT. PCHR insists that the Israeli government immediately ends its belligerent occupation, which is a direct cause of these problems, and that the international community immediately pressurize the Israeli authorities to comply with their international commitments.
