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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development
and peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement presented by Ittijah — Union of Arab Community- based Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.

Statement

Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, in the Israeli Economy¹

A growth of 4% has recently been measured in the Israeli economy. Still, the fruits of growth have seen unequal distribution.² The current trend is towards a growing inequality between high-income and middle- and lower-income households. This trend is entrenched due to the segmentation of the Israeli society into many different ethnic and socio-cultural groups, visible among Palestinian citizens of Israel, and mostly among women.³

As for 2003, Palestinian citizens of Israel comprised 19.3% of the whole population, while Palestinian women comprised about half of the Palestinian population living in Israel.⁴ They face discrimination on three levels: for being women, for being part of a patriarchal male-dominated society and for being part of an indigenous ethnic minority living in Israel, thus making them the most disadvantaged community living in Israel.

Since October 2000 and the beginning of the second Intifada (the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation), women as well as men have been frequently affected by the conflict either directly or indirectly. During 2002-2003, forms of state support were affected by a series of budget cutbacks leading to a downturn in the nation's economy. All sectors of the population were affected; however, poor families, and Palestinian women in particular, suffered the most.⁵

In the past few years, the government of Israel carried out a complete change in its social policy which negatively contributed to the economic stability.⁶ Immediate cutbacks were aimed at the working-age population, distorted the social security net of the country and harmed achievements accomplished over many years.⁷ These economic measures were initiated in response to the reduction of economic activity, which was the outcome of two factors: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the world recession.⁸ While other parts of the world began to evince economic growth, the recession in Israel only deepened. The conflict became the dominant factor in the Israeli recession.⁹ The Government was able to allocate large budgets to the defense for preserving the occupation, defending and building new settlements and expanding existing ones. It also invested billions in a wall, whose cost is far higher than originally planned, after confiscating large portions of Palestinian territory.¹⁰

The budget proposal for fiscal year 2005, which is currently in an approving process in the Israeli Parliament, is a direct continuation of the destructive fiscal policies that are leading more families to poverty, with Palestinian women being the group most affected.

Women as well as men have been adversely affected, differently though, as a result of the armed conflict, as recognized in UN Security Council resolution 1325, as well as in the S.C. Study from October 2002 regarding the impacts of armed conflict on women. One of the major impacts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on women in Israel was strengthening the feminization of poverty, mostly visible in employment and the economy.

NII's recent report¹¹ reveals hard data regarding the incidence of poverty. A Palestinian family is three times more likely to be poor than a Jewish family - 55.6% of Arabs live below the poverty line, compared with 30.8% among Jews.¹² Moreover, senior officials in the Bank of Israel stated recently that the poverty rate is 30% higher than NII reported.

In addition, the data of 2003 reveals that the rate of Arab children who live below the poverty line is growing to 57.5% vis-à-vis 30.8% of Jewish Children.

As such, poverty in Israel has been regarded only as an economic issue related to development. This statement will however emphasise that the phenomenon of poverty is a security problem, as well as a development issue, as illustrated in the Report of the Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility."

Two main factors influence the extent of poverty among Arabs in Israel: large families and low income, which is a function of high unemployment rates; low wages; and a high proportion of single-breadwinner families due in part to the low participation of Arab women in the labor force.¹³

Inequality between Palestinians and Jews in employment can be illustrated through several spheres: As for 2002, the rate of participation in the workforce among Palestinians in Israel aged 15 and over, was 39% compared with 57% among Jews.¹⁴ However, among Palestinian women, only 17.1% participated in the workforce compared to 54% among Jewish women.¹⁵ The participation of Palestinian Bedouin women (mostly live in the south) is even far lower, comprising 6% of the workforce!¹⁶ The gap in working rates among Jewish and Palestinian men leaves many families without any breadwinner, thus losing social benefits,¹⁷ preserving gender and ethnic inequality.

Disparities in appointments to public posts: as for 2002 Palestinians comprised only 6.1% of the employees in Israel,¹⁸ whereas they comprise 19.3% of the whole population. Moreover, of all Palestinian employees in public posts, Palestinian women comprised only 38.8%, while the total rate of women in the public posts comprised 62.4%.¹⁹

Disparities in employment income: Average family income of Palestinians in Israel is 57% of the average family income of Jews, which in addition to a lower rate of income among women (69% of men's average income) leads to the fact that only 3% of Palestinian households are in the top one fifth of households nationally, compared with 22% of Jewish households.²⁰

Unemployment gap between Jews and Palestinians in Israel: Since 1996, the overall unemployment rate in Israel has been rising steadily. This trend peaked during the recession of 2001-2003 but the increase among Palestinians has been steeper, with a growing disparity between the rate for Arabs and the rate for Jews.²¹

Unequal access to employment and access to additional jobs: Industrial zones situated in Arab localities compose a resource of employment for Arabs, both men and women, in which they create additional jobs. However, as for 2003, only 3.2% of the industrial zones in local municipalities and under Israel's supervision are located in Arab localities.²²

Lack of mobility and public transportation in Arab villages is another component in preventing full and equal participation of Arab women in the workforce in addition to violating their basic right of providing equal and free access to movement.

Lack of service and facilities such as day-care centers and facilities: As for 2003, out of 1,700 day-care facilities, only 36 were located in Arab communities – comprising only 2% of day-care centers, while Palestinian children comprise 30% of all children in Israel.²³

A low rate in business enterprises is common in the Arab sector in Israel, especially among women who are mostly dependent on family resources and income. Palestinian women turn to local markets and their ability to develop business enterprises is very low.²⁴

Instead of creating equal access to employment and increasing the participation of Palestinians in the work force, the Government has, inter alia, delayed planning processes; prevented designating budgets to establish industrial zones and new neighborhoods and did not encourage accessibility to transportation.²⁵

The above state of affairs is due to unequal treatment and implementation of the Israeli domestic legal system; violation of international human rights law, which Israel has signed and ratified and which calls for member states to ensure equal access and participation of women in employment and economy, such as CEDAW, ICESCR, ICCPR; and violation of resolution 1325, which calls for member states to fully implement international human rights law for women and girls during and after conflicts.

Indeed, the debate on gender issues is clearly growing in Israel, yet very little of it is visible in practice and gender mainstreaming is almost unheard of.²⁶ No affirmative action or special measures are being conducted and taken to promote Palestinian women's equal access to employment, equal representation and appointments in public posts and larger role in the Israeli economy.

Social and cultural factors create a huge weight in excluding and restricting Palestinian women from the economic sphere. However, Articles 2(f) and 5(a) of CEDAW call for abolishing and modifying such patterns and eliminating all practices based on stereotyped roles for men and women.

In conclusion, the goal of advancing and empowering women as stated in Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other outcome documents are not being fulfilled or referred to, hence we call on the Commission to instruct the Government of Israel, to implement its international obligations towards ensuring equality, especially economic equality, for Palestinian women. In addition, the phenomenon of poverty in Israel, affecting mostly Palestinian women, should be discussed during the U.N. special summit in September 2005, as has been recommended by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility."

1 This statement refers only to Palestinian citizens of Israel living inside Israel, unless stated otherwise.

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Center . Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel, May 2001. Available at:

<http://www.adva.org/aim/aim.html>

3 Id.

4 The Arab Population in Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, available at:

<http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2004/01>

5 The Sikkuy Report 2003-2004, Monitoring Civic Equality Between Arab and Jewish Citizens of Israel, November 2004, published by Sikkuy . The Association for the Advancement of Civil Equality, available at:

<http://www.sikkuy.org.il/english/report%202004.pdf>

6 Leah Achdout, Annual survey 2002-2003, National Insurance Institute, April 2004, available at:

http://www.btl.gov.il/English/pirsumim/annual_survey/skira_20023.pdf

7 Id.

8 Dr. Shlomo Swirski et-al, Two Years of Destructive Policies, Critique of the Budget Proposal for Israel for Fiscal 2004, from a Gender Perspective, Adva Center, available at:

<http://www.adva.org/Budget2004GenderEnglish.htm>

9 Id.

10 Id.

11 Poverty and Inequality in Income Division, National Insurance Institute, November 2004, available only In Hebrew at: <http://www.btl.gov.il/pdf/oni2003.pdf>

12 Id., supra n. 5.

13 Supra n. 5

14 Id.

15 Id.

16 Supra n. 4.

17 Supra n. 5

18 The Sikkuy Report 2002-2003, Monitoring Civic Equality Between Arab and Jewish Citizens of Israel, July 2003, available at:

<http://www.sikkuy.org.il/2003/english03/en2003.html>

19 Id.

20 Supra n. 5

21 Id.

22 Supra n. 18.

23 Id.

24 Ageta Nira Krauss, Women in Israel, Compendium of Data and Information, published by The Israel's Women Network, available at:

<http://www.iwn.org.il/DataBookE.htm>

25 Ameen Fares, State Budget and The Arab Citizens, A Socio-Economic Report 2004, Published in Hebrew by Mossawa Center . The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens of Israel.

26 Supra n. 2