



Al Mezan Center for Human Rights

Factsheet on Women in Armed Conflict

2012

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This factsheet shows to what extent women in the Gaza Strip are affected by armed conflict between Palestinians and the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). It also shows the historic development of women's rights and the international community's attempts to enhance women's rights during armed conflict as well as in normal conditions. The factsheet shows the indirect consequences that women tolerate even when they are not the direct victims.

This factsheet presents the data for IOF direct violations against Palestinian women in general and also presents the indirect consequences, with the statistics for destroyed houses and forcibly displaced women.

Women's Protection in Armed Conflicts and Enhancing their Participation in Peace Building and Protecting their Rights

Armed conflicts are considered the source of a various number of violations of international humanitarian law or international human rights law. Figures show that in any armed conflict, internal or external, the most vulnerable groups in society are women, children, people of low socioeconomic status, and people who have been marginalized. These are the people who are most likely going to be subject to violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

Therefore, IHL was developed over several years in order to provide protection for such groups, particularly women. The most successful achievement in this regard has been the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC) Resolution No. 1325 of 2000 on the protection of women in times of war and enhancing their role in prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peace building and post-conflict situations. The international community sought development and monitoring of women's situations in armed conflicts around the world. The UNSC ratified a number of resolutions related to the aforementioned resolution as resolution number 1,820 of 2008, 1,888, and 1889 of 2009. In October 2010, the UNSC commemorated the tenth anniversary of ratifying resolution 1,325. In December 2012, the UNSC issued resolution number 1,960.

Developments relating to enhancing women's rights in armed conflict and enhancing their participation in peace building come from a firm guarantee for women rights in international law. The Charter of the United Nation; the Universal Declaration for Human Rights; the International Covenants on Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Political Rights of Women of 1952 "*women shall be entitled to vote in all elections, ... hold public office to exercise all public functions... on equal terms with men without any discrimination*"; Convention on the Nationality of Married Women of 1957; Convention on Consent to Marriage; Minimum Age for Marriage of 1962; and Convention on Elimination of All Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) guarantee all rights and freedoms for all people on equal terms without any discrimination.

Israeli Aggression against Gaza Strip and its Consequences for Women

Women are regularly victims of direct aggressions. Women regularly bear the impacts of ongoing Israeli attacks and aggressions. Even when women are not killed or injured their suffering is exacerbated due to forcible displacement. Women are always responsible for the continuity of family life, taking care of their children, and trying to decrease the psychological consequences of Israeli aggressions.

When husbands die, the women take over the full responsibility of caring for the family. Women became the source of income for the whole family in a society where poverty and unemployment prevail. Women see their children killed before their eyes and are unable to protect them.

Table illustrates the number of victims of women and children and their destroyed homes between 27 September 2000 and 13 November 2012

Type of Damage	Number
Destroyed homes in which women live	89,696
Destroyed homes owned by women	447
Women killed (under and over 18)	418
Girls killed (under 18)	190
Women killed (over 18)	
Women who lost their husbands	1,798
Men killed with more than one wife	37

During the last Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip code-named “Pillar of Clouds”, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) destroyed houses while its residents were inside. **Excerpt from an affidavit taken by Al Mezan to show women’s suffering.**

On 19 November 2012, Israeli aircraft fired a roof-knocking rocket followed by a missile on the Azzam family house in Az-Zaitoun neighborhood. As a result, the house and the adjacent Abu Zoor family house were totally destroyed. Sahar Fadi Asa’ad Abu Zoor, 20; Nesma Helmi Abu Zoor, 20; Mohammed Iyad Abu Zoor, 5, and ‘Ahed Hamdi Al Qatatti, 34, were killed. 18 other persons were injured in the attack.

Excerpt from an affidavit taken by Al Mezan from Sa’adi Fouad Abu Zoor, 24, the husband of Nesma.

“At around 3:10 am on Monday 19 November 2012, I was sleeping in my room, which is located on the third floor of the family house. My wife and my two children were sleeping beside me on the bed. I suddenly woke up from the sound of a big explosion which came from the house of our neighbor Khalil ‘Azzam which is located directly behind us... I could hear the window panes smash. I felt shrapnel hit my face...

A minute later, another huge explosion took place. I saw a yellow light in my room. I felt something pass through my bed and fall down on the lower floor in my brother Iyad’s flat, which is located on the second

floor... I saw the TV fall on the wife's head. At that moment I fainted... I woke up when my family was carrying my wife, children, and I to the first floor, to my family's flat.

We opened the main door of the house to flee. We left the house. My wife was carrying my daughter Rawan. My uncle Mohammed Sa'adi Abu Zoor, 50, who is living in a nearby house called my wife... she went with him and went to the second floor. I saw my neighbor 'Ahed Al Qatatti, 38, walking towards us to help us.

A big explosion took place in the vicinity of our home. I felt that I was thrown in the air. I hit a door of one of our neighbors' homes opposite us. I screamed hysterically. I went directly to my uncle's home to check on the safety of my wife and daughter. Because dust was coming out of our home, my uncle's home, and the Azzam family home I knew that all three houses had been attacked.

I went to the second floor of my uncle's house. I could hear shrill screams. I thought it was from injured and terrified people. I started to shout where is wife? Where is my daughter? More than one person was saying they are fine. I could not see because of the dust. I could only hear voices. Few minutes later, dust started to disappear. I searched for my wife and daughter. I found my daughter over a tin-sheet used for a roof of one of the rooms. I carried her in my hands and went downstairs. She was bleeding from her head. I took her to the street where one of the paramedics took her to the ambulance. I fainted. I woke up at the Shifa Hospital and my mother told me that my wife; my cousin's wife; and our neighbor 'Ahed Al Qatatti, who came to help us; were all killed. I cried a lot."

On 14 November 2012, Israeli aircrafts fired three missiles at the Arafat family home in Az-Zaitoun neighborhood south of Gaza City. As a result, Ronan Yousif Jalal 'Arafat, 5, was killed and her mother was injured.

Excerpt from an affidavit taken by Al Mezan from the child's mother, Nisreen Ameen 'Arafat, 27.

"I went outside my home to say goodbye to our relatives who were paying us a visit. When I was on my way back inside the house, I heard a big explosion in the vicinity of our home. My three sons and my sister-in-law Eman Jalal 'Arafat were standing by my side when I was saying goodbye to our relatives. I took hold of my sons' hands and entered the house.

I suddenly heard another explosion. I felt the house was being destroyed above us. I felt that I was under rubble. I was calling Jalal and Ronan. I was saying Shehada [a powerful prayer in Islam, recited as an affirmation of faith]) because I felt I would die. I heard my son Jalal saying "Mom get me out of here... Get me out". His voice was coming from under the rubble. I could not see him. I could not hear my daughter Ronan.

Five minutes later, I heard people coming, entering the house, and walking inside it as if they were walking over our head. I also could hear the sound of their movements as they were trying to remove rubble... They uncovered me. I could hear my son calling for help. He was saying "Mom, I'm suffocating. I cannot breathe". People carried me to the ambulance which was parked outside. They brought my son Jalal and put him in the ambulance. They took us to Shifa Hospital to receive medical treatment.

It was clear that I had a wound on my head; I received seven stitches and three other stitches in my right leg. My body was covered by wounds. My son Jala could not move or walk. His body was also covered in

wounds. My brother Salah Ameen Fattouh, 37, came to the hospital and I asked him about my daughter Ronan. He told me that she was killed.”

On 15 November 2012, an Israeli aircraft fired a missile in the vicinity of the Tafseh family home in Az-Zaitoon neighborhood south of Gaza City. As a result, Haneen Khalid Tafesh, 10 months, was killed and her mother was injured.

Excerpt from an affidavit taken by Al Mezan from the child’s mother, Huda Tafesh, 21.

“I’m married and have a daughter called Haneen, 10 months. At around 11:30 am on Thursday 15 November 2012, I went to check on my daughter who was sleeping in my bedroom. I opened the door and suddenly heard a big explosion. The roof and walls of the room fell over me and my sleeping daughter. I fainted and fell to the floor.

When I woke up I saw my brother-in-law Ahmed. I asked him about my daughter Haneen. He said she was okay. When we arrived at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, they let me out of the ambulance. I found my husband crying. I entered the accident and emergency department to receive medical treatment. They gave me an injection and found that I had a fracture in my back and in my right hand and also some bruises.

I asked my husband about Haneen. He said she is fine nothing is wrong with her. They took me out of the hospital and took me to my family’s house in Al Karama towers. At around 7:30 pm on the same day, I knew from TV channels that my daughter was killed. One of the treating doctors phoned my husband who was with me in my family’s house informing him that my daughter died.”

Tawfeeq Mammdouh Eid An-Nassassra who lost two of his sons and whose wife lost her sight talked to Al Mezan about the attack and destruction of his home.

Excerpt from Tawfeeq An-Nassassra:

“At around 10:00 pm on Monday 19 November 2012, my family and I were inside our home. My daughters Rana, Fadda, and Zainab were sleeping in their room. My sons Mohammed, Ahmed, and Sakher were sleeping in the living room. My wife Amani and my two daughters Lama and Sama and I were in my room. I was sitting on a mattress on the floor watching TV. My daughters were sitting beside me. My wife was sitting on the bed.

I suddenly found myself covered by a tin sheet. I could see fire opposite me. I could hear my daughter Rana calling me. I removed the tin sheet and found myself in a land owned by my neighbor Ibrahim Isalieh. The land is located 15 meters away from the south of my house. The place was dark as the electricity was off. I was touching things and moving towards my daughter’s sound until I reached her. I found her under stones. I removed the stones and took her from there.

I heard my wife screaming “where are my daughters?”. I was crying where are my sons Mohammed and Ahmed?. At that moment I saw a number of our neighbors holding their cell phone and using the lights to search the place. They found my sons in the area. Ahmed was about 60 meters away from our home,

Mohammed was about 20 meters away, and Sakher was eight meters away. Ambulances arrived and carried us to Abu Yousif An-Najjar Hospital and Gaza European Hospital.

During my stay at Abu Yousif An-Najjar Hospital I knew that my sons Mohammed, 19; and Ahmed, 17, were killed and taken to the morgue. Doctors treated a fracture in my left leg. My wife lost her sight as she sustained burns to her face. My sons Sakher who is less than 12 years old underwent surgery to remove his spleen and his health condition is still critical. My daughter Lama who is less than four years old sustained burns to her face and three fractures in her left leg and she had platen transplantation. My daughter Sama who is less than two years sustained burns to her legs. The rest of my sons sustained wounds and bruises. My mother Zainab, 75, was injured while she was on her way to my home. When I returned home I saw a 10 meter-deep hole instead of my home. My home was completely destroyed and its stones were scattered in the vicinity of my land.”

Amani is one of hundreds who lost her sight and children; her house was destroyed and she has been made a forcibly displaced woman with vision impairment. Amani will suffer immensely from this event. . According to Al Mezan’s field investigations there was no reason to attack that area. There was neither military operation nor rocket launching. Not one of the family members is affiliated to Palestinian resistance fractions.

Naji ‘Awad Mousa Qdeeh, 48, talked to Al Mezan about the killing of his wife. Excerpt from his affidavit:

“My wife Samaher, my daughter Mayar, less than three months, and I were sleeping in my second home. My home consists of a living room that does not have a roof, a cement-roofed bedroom, a tin-roofed kitchen and a bathroom. My home is about 48 square meters in area. Outside the house there is a garden that separates between this house and the house of my first wife Maha. The house is about 96 square meters in area and consists of two cement-roofed rooms, a tin sheet-roofed living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. I woke up upon the sound of big explosion that shook my house.

I decided to move to the house of my first wife afraid for my wife, daughter, and I... I found my wife Samaher lying on the ground. I picked her up and noticed that her left leg was amputated and her mouth was filled with blood. I carried her out of the house and took her by a civilian car. We moved about 300 meters away from the house and found an ambulance where paramedics took my wife and admitted her to Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. She was admitted to the Emergency and Accident Department where she was pronounced dead”.

Samaher was killed in a way that violates IHL. A little girl lost her mother. Circumstances of the crime show that there is no reasonable justification for the IOF to attack this house. The attack shows a haphazard approach by the IOF in its unexplained attack to the family property and its inhabitants.

During the Israeli aggression a number of women and children were killed and injured in direct Israeli attacks on residential houses. On 18 November 2012, Israeli aircrafts attacked the house

of Jamal Mahmoud Ad-Dalou, 55, which is located in An-Naser neighborhood west of Gaza city. As a result, 13 persons were killed including five women and five children.

The house of Refa't Mohammed Yousif Jaber, 41, which is located in Beit Lahiya was destroyed and seven of its residents were injured including his wife Maha, 38, his twin daughters, Muna and Sawsan, 18, Lina, 4, and Sawsan Zakariya Jaber, 45. Medical sources at Kamal Odwan Hospital described their injury as moderate. The IOF also attacked a garden flat owned by Ghazi Abed Mohammed Salman in Beit Lahiya. As a result, Tahreer Ziyad Al Bahri, 22, was killed and her husband was injured. The IOF attacked the house of Suliman Abdel Hameer Salah, 59, which is located in Jabaliya refugee camp, while its residents were inside. As a result, his wife Faiyza Ahmed Salah, 53, was injured along with three neighboring women. The IOF attacked the vicinity of the house of Ibrahim Ahmed Is'efan, 54, in Jabalia. As a result, his granddaughter Jumana, 2, and her brother Tamer were killed and their mother was injured. The IOF attacked the house of Fouad Khalil Hijazi, 46, which is located in Jabaliya refugee camp. As a result, he was killed as well as his sons Mohammed, 4, and Suhaib, 2. Seven of the house residents were found injured under rubble including Amna Mohammed Hijazi, 43, and her daughter Nour, 19. 21 persons were also injured in the attack including four women. The IOF attacked a farm belonging to Talal Sa'adi Al 'Asali, 48, which is located in Jabaliya. As a result, he was killed along with his son Ayman, 19, and his daughter Abeer, 12.

The below table shows statistics collected by Al Mezan on the numbers of loses and damages that affected women and their houses during the Israeli military operation "Pillar of Clouds" which started on Wednesday 14 November 2012 and Ended at midnight of Wednesday 21 November 2012.

Table shows number of victims and damage to their property¹

Type of damage	Number
Women killed	14
Children killed	36
Women killed under 18	10
Women injured under 18	163
Women injured over 18	406
Houses destroyed	2,138
Houses destroyed owned by women	149
Houses destroyed in which women lived	10,072

¹ The circumstances are not clear surrounding the death of one woman with her two children. Whether they were killed by Israeli missiles or locally launched rockets has not been determined. They are classified under killing in armed conflict and they are added to numbers mentioned in this sheet.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The data in this factsheet shows that women are subject to direct Israeli attacks as they are targeted while they are inside their homes and amongst their children. This sheet sheds light on the exceptional suffering of Palestinian women in Gaza who, even when not directly attacked, bear the incredible burden of loss of spouse or home. with the dire consequences of poverty, unemployment, and forcible displacement

This factsheet shows that the IOF committed flagrant and systematic violations of IHL and IHRL including conventions related to women and other related UN resolutions.

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights strongly condemns the Israeli gross violations of IHL, which provides protection for civilians, particularly women and children. Al Mezan asserts that the failure of the international community to uphold its moral and legal obligations towards the protection of Palestinian women and the failure to implement UN resolutions and conventions related to the protection of women encourages Israel to commit and escalate its violations.

Therefore, Al Mezan calls on:

- The international community to uphold its moral and legal obligations towards civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), particularly women and children in the Gaza Strip;
- The international community to implement principles of accountability for gross violations of international law;
- UN Women to work towards the protection of women in oPt, enhance their protection in armed conflict, and follow necessary procedures to disclose Israeli crimes committed against women in the Gaza Strip;
- The Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women to work towards ending ongoing Israeli violations against women and to ensure the respect of UN related resolutions and conventions.

End