

Implementing CEDAW for Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon: Breaking Through Layers of Discrimination

A synopsis: Oral Statement & Recommendations

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Thank you Madam Chair,

My name is Aziza Khalidi of Association Najdeh Lebanon. I will be presenting a synopsis of a collaborative initiative among several NGOs that focus on gender issues within the Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon.

There are multiple layers of discrimination that interact ‘synergistically’ to impede the implementation of CEDAW principles and there is a multiplicity of accountable agencies.

Statelessness and Refugee status are additional layers of discrimination to that of gender: There is no sovereign state to apply formal reciprocity measures especially regarding access to work and civil rights. Palestinian refugee women belong to marginalized communities that live in islands of poverty called camps and informal gatherings.

Gender discrimination is apparent at the legal domain which Palestinian refugee women share with Lebanese women especially in the Personal Affairs Law. Politically: it is manifested by a minimal degree of involvement in higher Palestinian political decision making structures. Culturally and in the health domain, gender discrimination is manifested by domestic violence: about one quarter of women report being beaten by their husbands.

A comprehensive application of the principle of ‘state obligation’ is shared along with the hosting Lebanese government by the Palestine liberation organization in its capacity as the internationally recognized representative of Palestinians in Diaspora.

In examining the principle of equality, again in addition to the Lebanese government, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA is accountable for ensuring gender equality in practicing their mandate in health, education, and social service provision.

Thank you Madam Chair.

Recommendations of the Report of Palestinian Women Refugees– as they appear in the first supplementary report submitted to CEDAW Committee,

- Reaffirming recommendations presented in the Lebanese NGO shadow report pertaining to the status of Lebanese women. Implementing such recommendations would eliminate several impediments towards fully implementing CEDAW for refugee women in general and for Palestinian refugee women in particular.
- Calling upon the Lebanese government given its responsibility in protecting the refugee population,
 - To apply the civil and social human rights covenant to Palestinian refugee women and men residing in Lebanon with a special emphasis on the right to work since that would eliminate a significant impediment towards implementing CEDAW for refugee women.
 - To recognize the special vulnerable status of Palestinian refugee women vis-à-vis other refugee women given the lack of a sovereign state that would allow applying the principle of reciprocity in civil matters including work.
 - To call on the United Nations to increase resources allocated to UNRWA as well as intensifying linkages between UNRWA and UNHCR especially in the area of sharing information and experiences on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and adapting the UNHCR SGBV Guidelines to the needs of Palestine refugee women.
 - To include a section in the State Report that assesses the implementation of CEDAW on refugee women in general and Palestine refugee women in particular.
 - To advocate along with appropriate agencies efforts to ameliorate living conditions for Palestinian refugees with a special attention to elderly refugee women living alone.
- Calling upon the Palestine Liberation Organization given its responsibility in maintaining the national identity of the refugee population, to increase the participation of women in higher levels of political decision making.
- Calling upon the international community and specifically the UN General Assembly given its responsibility in supporting UNRWA
 - To enhance efforts to support the valiant efforts of this organization within its domain to insure basic health, education and social services to women and to the population at large,
 - And provide special support and acknowledgement of its efforts at mainstreaming gender in its operation
 - To enhance existing linkages with UNHCR especially in the field of sexual and gender based violence.