

Gender based Violence Under Colonialism

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The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a global campaign that runs annually from November 25 to December 10, aiming to raise awareness about violence against women and girls. However, in the context of Palestine, this campaign takes on a particular urgency and significance, given the deeply entrenched political, social, and humanitarian challenges faced by Palestinian women, especially those living under occupation in Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinian women have been subjected to a wide range of gender-based violence for decades. This violence comes not only from patriarchal societal structures but also as a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation, military aggression, and systemic oppression. The 16 Days of Activism provide an important opportunity to focus on the specific forms of violence that Palestinian women face and to highlight their resilience in the face of adversity.

Palestinian women are experiencing a unique form of gender-based violence imposed by the Israeli occupation in Gaza during the ongoing war. Women are victims of various types of violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Women in the West Bank are not excluded of GBV: the occupation itself through military raids, settler violence, arbitrary arrests, home demolitions, and closures, all this creates a climate of fear and uncertainty. But this state-sponsored violence is often compounded by patriarchal systems within Palestinian society, which can make it difficult for women to speak out or seek support.

In Gaza, where an ongoing blockade by Israel has created severe economic and humanitarian crises, women suffer from the compounded stress of displacement, limited access to healthcare, and a breakdown of social services, separation of their families. Women are particularly vulnerable in the context of the repeated Israeli airstrikes, military incursions, and a lack of security. In the West Bank, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the frequent clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian protesters further endanger the lives of women and girls.

Israeli military raids and the siege of Gaza leave Palestinian women at the mercy of violence and trauma. Palestinian women who encounter challenges of unsafety, starvation, lack of daily life basics are subjected to psychological and mental complications.

In addition to all mentioned, the destruction of critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and public services, severely limits women's access to education, healthcare, and other basic human rights.

Gazan women are exposed to sexual violence and sexual exploitation during war. This is considered as an alarming form of GBV. Victims of sexual violence in Gaza are often reluctant to report incidents due to fear of social stigma, lack of legal recourse, or even retaliation from both Israeli authorities and Palestinian authorities.

The aggression against Gaza and the isolation of Gaza from the rest of the West Bank and Jerusalem and the rest of the world has created a situation where women face additional pressures, as movement restrictions and limits their ability to access medical care and legal protection.

Women in Israeli prisons

It is particularly underreported the violence against Palestinian women is the abuse they face in Israeli prisons. Palestinian women are frequently detained by Israeli forces for resisting the occupation or in connection with their family members' political activities. Many of these women are subjected to physical and psychological abuse, including torture, forced confessions, and solitary confinement. Some are also victims of sexual violence, including strip searches and other forms of humiliation

Palestinian women who are arrested are often denied basic rights, including access to legal counsel or medical care, while their detention can have long-lasting consequences on their mental and physical health. The impact of such treatment is devastating, especially for those who are pregnant or have young children.

Palestinian Women's Resilience and Advocacy

Despite all of the challenges women face, Palestinian women have been at the forefront of the Palestinian resistance movements and are still resisting and advocating for their rights in different ways.

Activists and grassroots organizations work such as Wi'am, tirelessly to provide support and services to victims of violence, such as legal aid, healthcare, and psychological counselling. Palestinian women are also challenging patriarchal norms within their communities by calling for legal reforms and pushing for greater participation in political and social decision-making processes.

There is a huge need to work and support women survivors of violence by offering them trauma therapy and advocating for their rights and promoting gender equality.

During the 16 Days of Activism, Wi'am along with other partners take part in campaigns, workshops to highlight the intersection of violence, occupation, and patriarchy. They work to create spaces for women to share their stories, demand justice, and advocate for their rights. Women, men and school and university students and family participate in different trainings events and workshops implemented by Wi'am team. Men involved in activities and events planned by Wi'am become agents of change in many ways, they can speak up, they can work on preventing and combating "harmful masculinities" and become allies in fighting gender based violence.

International solidarity plays a crucial role in amplifying the voices of Palestinian women. The international community must continue to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, which protects civilians under occupation. Additionally, international advocacy must focus on ending the Gaza aggression, promoting women's participation in peacebuilding processes, and ensuring that Palestinian women have access to justice and equality.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence creates an important platform that reflects on the specific forms of violence faced by Palestinian women in Gaza and the West Bank, who live under the constant threat of occupation and patriarchy. Palestinian women face multiple forms of oppression, colonial violence, patriarchal norms, and economic instability, in spite of all that, they continue to show immense strength, resilience, and activism in the face of hardship. Palestinian women are not just victims, they are leaders, fighters, and advocates for a future free of violence and oppression.