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Letter dated 6 July 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Geraldine Byrne Nason**
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Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 6 July 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, held on 24 June 2022

On 24 June 2022, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held a meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It was the first time that the Informal Expert Group had discussed the Palestinian question, and the Co-Chairs noted the recent escalation of violence and the killing of the Palestinian-American journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, in May 2022. While the Security Council had invited a few Palestinian and Israeli women from civil society to give briefings during its meetings, issues related to women and peace and security had thus far played only a minor role in either the deliberations or outcomes of the Council. The Group heard a briefing by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked several questions about women's lack of participation in the peace process and what the United Nations could do to engage more with women in civil society and universities and to promote the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government. Other questions were raised about the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, following accession thereto by the Palestinian authorities, the bill on family protection, the root causes of the gender inequality affecting Palestinian women and girls, the shrinking civic space for Palestinian non-governmental organizations and activists and the visibility or impact of women-led initiatives to find common ground across conflict lines. Several Council members asked for more gender analysis in the United Nations reports to the Council.

Main points raised in the meeting

- The overall context is characterized by increased violence, settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions, as well as political fragility on both sides, with a marked split between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto authorities in Gaza, and a Palestinian population made up of people mostly born after the Oslo peace process.
- Women have been markedly underrepresented in formal peace negotiations for decades. In part, this reflects women's lack of representation in decision-making institutions, including political parties and elected and appointed governance bodies. In Palestine, for example, 61 per cent of university students are women, but their participation in the workforce drops to 17 per cent. This may change in the long term, as Palestinian women are much more active in civil society and initiatives run by younger people, but the United Nations and international partners

will have to play a clear role in helping to achieve targets for women's participation and representation in the political process. In addition, the United Nations needs to increase its engagement with women in universities, the private sector and the care industry, including medical and social services. Efforts were made to increase women's participation in the elections planned for May 2021, the first in 15 years, but they were postponed indefinitely by the Palestinian Authority.

- The effects of the occupation on Palestinian women and girls are significant, especially given increased food insecurity and the growing pressure on access to basic services and funding shortages affecting both the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme. Unemployment rates hover around 56 per cent, and food prices keep increasing, forcing families to resort to negative coping mechanisms that mainly affect girls. In Gaza, for example, levels of aid dependency have reached 70 per cent, while 31 per cent of women-headed households are food insecure. In a survey conducted by the World Food Programme, more than 80 per cent of respondents did not have a bank account or even an automatic teller machine (ATM) card. Changing the dynamics for Palestinian women and girls is tied to changing the dynamics of the conflict and the occupation, from the violence to the checkpoints, demolitions and evictions that affect them daily.
- Some of the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations include facilitating the engagement of the vibrant and historic Palestinian women's movement, including with younger generations; advocating the adoption of the bill on family protection, which dates back to 2004, but for which there is a renewed push for adoption; targeting women-headed households with assistance; and supporting the Palestinian Authority in reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This has been made harder by the backlash against the Convention, which has grown stronger in recent weeks, in particular in Hebron, and includes the targeting of women human rights defenders and activists. Other recent obstacles include Israel's designation of six Palestinian civil society organizations, including the Union of Palestinian Women Committees, as "terrorist organizations" and the adoption, in March, of a law denying a path to naturalization for Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza who marry Israeli citizens.
- International partners must do more to support Palestinian civil society organizations and build their strength and resources, which could, in turn, increase their credibility and relevance on the ground and help them to become crucial actors in the political process. A significant part of the international community's involvement before and after the Oslo peace process was about supporting Palestinian civil society, and some of this has been lost in recent years. The civic space has shrunk in both the West Bank and Gaza, and international partners need to help in reversing this trend and to push back against the limitations imposed by the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group:¹

¹ The recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting, such as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

(a) Should the Council propose the adoption of a resolution or a statement by the President of the Security Council on the Palestinian question, the following language could be considered:

(i) Calls for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, internal reconciliation efforts and post-conflict reconstruction efforts;

(ii) Calls upon the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to create a safe and enabling environment for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors and women human rights defenders, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them;

(iii) Calls upon the Israeli Government to end the occupation, ensure independent and impartial investigations of allegations of excessive use of force by the Israeli security forces and of settler violence and ensure accountability and justice for victims, including women human rights defenders and journalists;

(iv) Calls upon the Israeli Government to refrain from all measures that affect the physical and psychological well-being and that have an impact on all aspects of the daily lives of Palestinian women living under occupation, including to cease the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and to prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law;

(v) Expresses strong concern about the impact of evictions and demolitions on the human rights of the women and children concerned, including their rights to adequate housing and to life, liberty and security of person;

(vi) Calls upon the Palestinian Authority to adopt legislation to protect women from gender-based violence, in line with the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

(vii) Requests the Secretary-General to include in his reports to the Security Council analysis on developments related to women and peace and security and the situation of women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory;

(viii) Calls upon the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to engage and consult regularly and meaningfully with women's civil society.

(b) In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group and other Council members should:

- Include in their statements at Security Council meetings on the Palestinian question references to women and peace and security and request United Nations briefers to include gender analysis in their briefings.
- Advocate the holding of free and fair elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with the full and equal participation of women.
- Support the implementation and resourcing of the Palestinian national action plan on women and peace and security and urge the Israeli Government to develop and adopt a national action plan in close cooperation with Israeli civil society.
- Advocate the prompt investigation and prosecution of violations against women and girls committed by State and non-State actors in the Occupied Palestinian

Territory and at checkpoints and advocate the provision of effective access to legal remedies and adequate compensation for victims.

- Provide flexible funding to women's rights organizations and ensure that funding remains accessible in an increasingly restricted civic space.
- Advocate with Palestinian authorities the adoption of the bill on family protection.
- Urge the mainstreaming of gender and the engagement of local women's organizations throughout the humanitarian response.

The Co-Chairs expressed thanks to all participants and encouraged Security Council members to follow up on the important issues raised at the meeting.
