

**Submission on Gender Justice and the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression, submitted by the Regional Coalition for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in MENA (<https://whrdmena.org>) on the situation in Palestine and Iraq**

**14 June 2021**

The Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) Regional Coalition in the Middle East and North Africa (WHRD MENA Coalition) would like to draw attention to the grave situation in Palestine, and the assassination of WHRDs in Iraq, whose perpetrators enjoy impunity.

The WHRD MENA Coalition welcomes the adoption of a resolution in which the Human Rights Council established an international commission of inquiry to investigate violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, and calls on the Commission to immediately start investigations, including mainstreaming a gender perspective to look into crimes against WHRDs and women.

The WHRD MENA Coalition documented with its members and partners more than 700 various violations against the Palestinian people by Israeli forces, in addition to various violations against women and WHRDs – not only in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – but in other countries in which WHRDs participated in solidarity actions with the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the attacks against them. Violations included physical assault, death threats, arrest, home raids, fabrication of charges [“of incitement through an attempt for the creation of a false image was made that demonstrations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are ‘anti-semitic’ and racist”, by focusing on the false claim that those arrested were inciting against Jews”](#). Moreover, WHRDs and Journalists were arrested in Jordan, including the Journalist Heba Abu Taha, who was assaulted, and a 15 years old child, where they both participated in solidarity actions and were released with bail the next day from the Administrative Governor’s office. Sudan also banned solidarity demonstrations using the claim of the novel Corona virus, COVID-19, and Facebook banned publishing any news or writing associated with the violations taking place against the Palestinian people that equate genocide. Subsequently, the WHRD MENA Coalition and To Be Foundation call for the immediate accountability of Israel for all crimes committed which are not only human rights violations, but are crimes against humanity due to the bombing of homes and killing of women, children and various groups of Palestinian people, which reached – according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights – in 11 days of continuous bombing, 247 dead including 66 children and 39 women, and 1416 wounded including 277 women and 412 children, in addition to the violations referred to above.

Violations against HRDs, WHRDs and Palestinians can be classified as follows, according to the report of Rights Advocated to Defend the Detainees of Demonstrations | the Terrorization of Israeli Arrests: random arrests, raid of houses and shops, assault and arrest of those who take photographs and document the attacks, physical assault during detention and transfer to detention centers, refusal of medical support and transfer to hospitals for treatment including eye injuries, death threats, collection of fake evidence, crowding numbers of arrestees in small vehicles, violation of children's rights during investigation by physical assault and psychological violence, violent physical assault in interrogation centers, and attack of lawyers among other violations.

Moreover, 35 Palestinians continue to be imprisoned who were exercising their right to protest against the occupation of Palestinian territories, of whom 26 were sentenced for varying periods, the highest for 16 years against the two prisoners Shurooq Dwayyat and Shatila Abu Ayyad. Three are under administrative detention, and they are political activists Khitam Al-Sa'afin, Bushra Al-Tawil, and Shorouk Al-Badan. Moreover, female detainees who are students have been arrested with no clear charges and their detention continues to be renewed indefinitely. WHRDs Khalida Jarrar and Khitam al-Sa'afin continue to be held behind bars.

In Iraq, a rise in the assassination of WHRDs took place, where in 2020 alone, 6 WHRDs were killed, among them Janat Mazi in Basra on 22 January 2020 while she was returning from protests and treating the injured by the hands of unidentified men in a 4 by 4 vehicle, Anwar Jassem Mehwes on 5 April 2020 in her home and her two sons got injured, who was known for calling for the continuation of protests in Thee Qar, Riham Yaacoub, a physician whose name appeared in a report by the Iranian News Agency Mahr, identifying her among others as agents working for the U.S., and was killed on 19 August 2020 in Southern Basra with a gun with a silencer.

While the Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) Regional Coalition welcomes the adoption of a resolution (A/HRC/S-30/L.1) in which the Human Rights Council established an international commission of inquiry to investigate violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, it calls on this commission to:

- Visit prisons and places of detention and meet demonstrators to investigate crimes committed both during interrogation and in detention
- Collect evidence on specific torture tactics used against those detained
- Collect evidence of weaponry used to commit crimes of genocide against Palestinians
- Ensure that settler processes are halted

- Mainstream a gender perspective to look into crimes against WHRDs and women, detailing specific measures taken to commit crimes of a gender-based nature

For the situation in Iraq and the assassination of WHRDs, the coalition calls for:

- Formation of an international independent commission to investigate the various assassinations, recognizing their gendered nature and context
- Issue a set of regulations and measures to criminalize and combat the killing of WHRDs
- Hold the state accountable for its complicity in allowing perpetrators enjoy impunity
- Hold states responsible for bringing perpetrators immediately to justice