

STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMISSION FOR A JUST & SUSTAINABLE PEACE BETWEEN ISRAEL & PALESTINE

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As violence increases again—and positions harden—in the wake of the recent Palestinian and Israeli elections, one truth has become urgent: both sides need to find ways to keep talking to each other. According to a public opinion poll taken jointly by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in March, an “overwhelming majority among Israelis and Palestinians favor negotiated rather than unilateral further disengagement.” We agree. Peace and security will never be won unilaterally.

As Palestinian, Israeli and international women, we ARE still talking to each other. We came together a year ago, in a more hopeful time, as the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace (IWC) convened by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). We are declaring our mission today because we believe it is more critical than ever not to let this hope die.

As women, who are deeply engaged in the politics of our respective communities, we oppose the continuation of violence, collective punishment, coercion, and continuous threats to personal rights which also threaten our own freedom. The IWC is dedicated to ending the Israeli occupation, to achieving a just peace and a two-state solution based on international law, human rights and equality.

The desire for a secure peace presents a challenge to the leadership on both sides. In Israel, the challenge is to recognize the link between the occupation and the deterioration of Israeli economic and social life. In the occupied Palestinian territory, the challenge is to give hope and regain faith in political processes to achieve liberation and enhance democracy.

As women, we have a key role to play in meeting these challenges and starting the longer-term process of rebuilding communities, reviving dialogue among all parts of society, and showing that there are other ways to live. This was the key message of the historic United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted unanimously in October 2000.

As women, both Israelis and Palestinians, we perceive unilateral actions as violations of basic human rights. We deplore the brutal culture of militarism and violence, the politics of fear and hate that manipulate public opinion. We know that in a world based on fear, hatred and despair we are all losers.

A secure peace demands an entirely different set of values and actions, one that honors the perspectives and concerns of both sides. As women, our voices have traditionally gone unheard on issues of national security. Yet we know that the only guarantee of our security rests on justice and the end to conflict.

However, as women we are absent from the spaces of power where men are taking decisions that will impact Palestinians and Israelis for generations to come. Despite the fact that Israel, Palestine and members of the Quartet have all pledged to implement Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for increased engagement of women at all levels of decision-

making in conflict resolution, this intention has still to be translated into practice. We can't wait for an invitation. It is time to hear what we think.

As women, we have dedicated ourselves to creating a better future for our children, grandchildren, and for our societies as a whole. We are determined to struggle unrelentingly to ensure full respect for human rights and adherence to international laws and conventions designed to learn from past experiences and prevent any repetition of the horrors due to wars and armed conflicts. Indeed, as women, we know that the guarantee of our security in the public and private spheres rests on the respect for the other.

A just and sustainable settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on a two state solution must be negotiated by both women and men. We call upon the Quartet and other members of the international community to fulfill their obligations in ensuring the end of the occupation, guaranteeing legal protection, and initiating negotiations between the parties. We urge civil society institutions and women in our societies, in Europe, the United States and throughout the world demand that their governments be proactive third parties in ending our protracted conflict. The International Women's Commission is ready to engage fully in this process, and make the promise of Security Council Resolution 1325 a reality.