

Reducing violence against women vital for peace in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territory – UN expert



In late June 2016, 19 Palestinians, including 12 children, lost their homes when Israeli forces demolished 5 structures in Susiya, south of Hebron, in the occupied Palestinian territory. Photo: OCHA

26 September 2016 – Concluding her first visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)/State of Palestine, a United Nations human rights expert called on both sides to strengthen their efforts to eliminate violence against women as well as to their rights in public and private sectors.

“I would like to call both sides to start a new peace process in which women would fully participate and even take the lead and in which international human rights law and humanitarian law would be applied jointly,” Dubravka Šimonovic, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women said in a news release issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

During Ms. Šimonovic’s 12-day visit, she examined the overall situation of violence against women and girls, gathered first-hand information from women survivors of violence, and met with representatives of each Government, the relevant authorities and civil society organizations, as well as with UN officials. She also visited shelters for victims of domestic violence and met with women victims of violence.

In the news release the expert also highlighted that the prolonged occupation has had a differentiated impact on women and girls, and noted that house demolitions, either in the

context of lack of building permits or on punitive grounds and forced evictions have a specific impact on women.

The Special Rapporteur's visit takes place after a long absence of visits by such mandate holders to the region and she will present reports with final findings and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2017.

Israel

In Israel, the human rights expert noted a number of legislative measures taken to prevent violence against women. In particular, she said "Amendments were made to the law of rape and sexual harassment. I commend the current work towards ratification of the Istanbul convention on prevention of violence against women."

However, she pointed out that specific groups of women, including women from the Palestinian minority (including Bedouin women), asylum-seekers, refugees, and women belonging to other minority communities face accrued and multiple form of discrimination and heightened risk of violence.

Occupied Palestinian Territory/State of Palestine

While recognizing the clear linkage between the prolonged occupation and violence against women, Ms. Šimonovic noted: "the occupation does not exonerate the State of Palestine from its due diligence obligation to prevent, investigate, punish and provide remedies for acts of gender-based violence under the areas and persons under its jurisdiction."

She noted particular concern on sexual violence and the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence in the Palestinian society. She also spoke out against perpetrator of rape being absolved, in some cases, if he marries the victim.

The Special Rapporteur also commended the accession to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) without reservations. "I am confident that such accession and the reporting to CEDAW monitoring body will play an important role in the harmonization of the current outdated legislative framework and bring it in line with international norms and standards," Ms. Šimonovic noted.

Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs, are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.