

## International Women's Day – 8 March 2017

We - the undersigned members of the Gender Working Group of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) - together with women and men worldwide - celebrate today the powerful and inspiring victories of the advancement of women and girls' rights and gender equality.

We also honour all the courageous women and girls' human rights defenders who protest injustice and whose names and reputation are attacked in return by slander, and whose lives are threatened. We celebrate their uplifting spirit, creativity, and sense of humour while working against all the odds. At the same time, we take a critical look at the present, witnessing rights violations perpetrated against women and girls in times of peace and war.

Today we call for respect for women and girls' rights and reparation for violations under the 2017 specific theme: *Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030*. We as a group consider women and girls' rights and gender equality to be at the core of democratic development and delivery of humanitarian aid, which entail two fundamental issues: justice and access to opportunities – equality of opportunities – for women, girls, men and boys alike. We as male and female are born equal and should be able to live as equal human beings here on earth. In some places, women, girls, men, and boys are equal before the law while gender discrimination remains in practice. In other places, women and girls are discriminated against in law and in practice. The mistreatment of women and girls and gender discrimination only varies in degree - not in its fundamental nature – across the world.

Forced and early marriages constitute one of the most harmful traditional practices and are considered violence against women and girls, resulting in grave violations of their rights with long-lasting consequences, including the right to health, education, employment, and the right to live free from violence and discrimination. In the gravest cases, women and girls are killed for having voluntary or involuntary sexual relations outside of marriage in the name of family honour. In Palestine, 1 in 50 girls marries before the age of 15, and 1 in 4 girls marries before 18 years old.

We welcome the accession of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) without reservations. That is commendable. We also welcome the forthcoming PNA report to the CEDAW Committee and shadow reports written by women's organisations. These reports will serve as the encouragement and the motivation for the State of Palestine to significantly ensure women and girls' rights and gender equality. It is and continues to be challenging for women's rights advocates and their organisations to hold the PNA to account under occupation. At the same time, the most courageous form of resistance is to continue to have aspirations towards one's government no matter what. Holding the Israeli government, as the occupying power, accountable for its violations of international law with disproportionately negative implications for women and girls, who are discriminated against in the first place, is not only crucial but truly essential. Women and girls are denied education and employment opportunities for the combined reasons of the occupation and gender discrimination. Women and girls are faced with multiple forms of gender-based violence on a daily basis, which is hard to report on as they subsequently risk even more harm and severe consequences if doing so. Women are grieving the loss of loved ones who have been imprisoned or killed, including children. Women and girls are suffering displacement as a result of subsequent wars in Gaza or house demolitions in the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

Every day, Palestinian women and girls' human rights defenders and their movements courageously challenge injustice and call for respect for women and girls' rights and accountability. We, the undersigned member organisations of the AIDA Gender Group, congratulate all of you today for your active and strong engagement towards the full enjoyment of women and girls' rights and accordingly greater gender equality in Palestine and worldwide.

Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz (ACPP)  
Alianza Por La Solidaridad (APS)  
Heks-Eper  
Individuell Människohjälp - Swedish Development Partner  
Terre des hommes Foundation, Lausanne Switzerland  
Heinrich Boell Foundation Palestin & Jordan  
The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

ENDS

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