On the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

Joint Statement: The UN, EU, and International Development Partners Raise Their Voices against Gender-based Violence in Palestine

25 November 2018

*On 25 November 2018, the international community in Palestine launches a joint campaign **"#HearMeToo: Voices against Violence"** to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence in Palestine. Civil society organizations and media outlets also join this national initiative to end violence against women and girls. The 16 Days campaign, annually commemorated worldwide, commences on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and lasts until 10 December, the Human Rights Day.*

Women and girls from all corners of the world continue to experience violence and abuse. And because such acts are often overlooked and invisible to many, the survivors are routinely shamed into silence. Tragically, violence against women and girls is mainly perpetrated by men close to them, such as intimate partners and family members. In addition, violence is taking an increasing number of forms - ranging from verbal and sexual harassment in the streets to domestic violence and femicide in the worst-case scenario.

Violence against women and girls is a serious challenge in Palestine as well. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women indicated in her report following her visit to Palestine in 2016, violence against women in Palestine occurs both in private and public spheres and women suffer from multiple sources of violence including from the Israeli occupation, whether directly or indirectly, and also from the tradition and culture, with embedded patriarchal social norms and outdated legal frameworks.

Moreover, the protracted humanitarian crisis in Gaza, particularly because of the unceasing blockade, has exacerbated gender-based violence in all its forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence and child marriage. According to the Gender-based Violence (GBV) Sub-Cluster in Palestine, cases related to sexual violence are further underreported due to stigma, lack of capacity and attitudes of service providers as well as concerns over safety and security of both the survivor and service providers.

The silence over violence against women and girls is usually reinforced by a non-supportive legal system that fails to criminalize domestic violence. In many countries, including Palestine, the applicable penal laws do not criminalize the acts of domestic violence, which stems from a traditional belief that family issues should be managed within the boundaries of the family. The International

Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) Palestine Report reveals that 1 in 4 Palestinian men reported witnessing their mother being beaten by their father or a male relative during their childhood, while 63 per cent of Palestinian men agreed that a woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

Recently, however, as a result of the strong advocacy of civil society organizations and women's movements from various parts of the world, many countries, including some Arab States, have begun to adopt specific legislation to respond to family violence. Palestine is in the final stage of the review of the Family Protection Bill, which is expected to be shortly submitted for consultations and to the President for endorsement.

The Family Protection Bill is expected to provide measures to prevent and combat violence, as well as due protection, reparation, and empowerment of survivors of violence, while holding perpetrators accountable for their acts. The endorsement of the Family Protection Bill will be a critical milestone in the journey towards ending violence against women and girls in Palestine. The real success, however, will come only with proper implementation and translation of the commitments embedded within the bill through responsive policies, services, and practices. To ensure that the Family Protection Bill passes with the full support of civil society, the civil society should be consulted on any amendments to the texts.

It is important that national and international stakeholders continue and expand their financial commitment to combat violence against women and girls in Palestine. Various actors have been working together to finance programmes aiming at ending violence against women (EVAW). Currently, EVAW programmes in Palestine are generously funded by the Palestinian Government, UN Agencies, International development partners such as Canada, Sweden, Italy, Netherlands, the European Union, Spain, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, Britain, Denmark, Japan, and others.

Violence against women cannot be eradicated without investing in gender equality. Therefore, it is also crucial to financially support the continuous efforts of the government and civil society organizations towards the effective implementation of the Concluding Observations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee, which includes a recommendation to give high priority to the adoption of the Family Protection Bill, to ensure gender equality and realize women's human rights in Palestine, and a recommendation to narrow and close the pay gap.

Let us unite to end violence against women and girls and provide a safe and just place where survivors of violence can speak up and seek justice. We are all responsible for shifting the narrative from blaming the survivors to ensuring the accountability of perpetrators, and for providing preventive measure such as the Family Protection Bill and the revision of the Labour Law through the gender lens.

The international community stands ready to support the Palestinian Government as it works towards creating a legal, policy and cultural environment that recognizes women as equal members of society and valuable contributors to the development of Palestine, who deserve a life free from violence.

END.