«Promotion of peace opportunities through ending exploitation against women’s rights in East Jerusalem - gender equality»

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Al-Maqdese works through its various projects and programs to protect and defend human rights, as well as working in both local and international spheres to defend Palestinians’ rights in the Jerusalem district. Additionally, Al-Maqdese works to document and disseminate Israeli violations against Palestinians’ rights, and demands that the Israeli authorities cease such violations and respect their individual and collective rights, according to the international laws and treaties.

MSD aims, through the project «Promotion of peace opportunities through ending exploitation against women’s rights in East Jerusalem-gender equality», to raise the awareness of Palestinian women on their rights, who have experienced and are threatened with displacement. To accomplish this, MSD provides support and training to facilitate the realization of these rights. The project also aims at empowering women economically, documenting their experiences and join the international objective of improving the status of women through the development of their economic, social and psychological situation. This is implemented through several activities including psychological treatment and development of social awareness and human rights training. MSD provides vocational training, documents the experiences of the women, and implements international and local advocacy initiatives in support of Palestinian women and their rights.

The project is implemented locally and internationally, in Jerusalem and Italy, in partnership with the European Center of Studies and Initiatives. This newsletter highlights the legal and psychological status of women in Jerusalem and Italy as well as the key activities of this project.
Our project activities in Jerusalem

• Conducting tens of individual and collective consulting sessions to identify psychological symptoms women suffer due to demolition and displacement. Collective consulting sessions were held for these women to address their problems, needs, and restrictions. MSD also strives to strengthen their capacities and engage them in fruitful activities in an attempt to empower them to leave a positive impact on such a harsh reality.

• Holding meetings with these women to raise their awareness on planning and building rights and their importance in order to obtain building licenses. These are carried out in coordination with Bimkom (Planners for Planning Rights organization) in the neighborhoods of Wadi Al-Joz and Sheikh Jarrah as well as in the Women’s Center in Al-Thouri.

• Preparing a study which monitors the impact of house demolition policies and forced displacement on Jerusalemite women.

• Organizing an honorary ceremony for Jerusalemite women on the occasion of International’s Women’s Day and a festival for their children, who have been exposed to house demolitions and forced displacement, on the occasion of the Palestinian Child’s Day.
A story of a Jerusalemite Woman

The story of Ms. D.R illustrates the suffering experienced by the women of East Jerusalem as a result of Israeli policies. It highlights the Israeli authorities’ blatant disregard for the rights of these women, which are guaranteed under international law, in particular her residency and housing rights.

Ms. D.R was twice expelled from her house, located in the Al-Aqaba neighborhood of Beit Hanina, the Israeli forces demolished her home in both 2008 and 2010. After the first demolition MS. D.R had no choice but to live in a tent for two months. This phase marked the beginning of her steadfastness. Despite the fact that this woman, who is in her late twenties, was exposed to severe suffering and was deprived of her security, she and her family refused to give up; they rebuilt their house with the help of Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICHAD).

The story started in 2008 when Ms. D.R received a phone call from her relatives saying that Israeli forces demolished her house which consisted of two rooms with an area of 60m2 and a playground.

The demolition of her home was devastating for her, especially when we take into consideration that she had no warning in advance. Usually, Jerusalem municipality issues house demolition notices before demolishing a house, but this was not the case with MS. D.R.

She was forced to live with her family (comprised of 6 persons, 4 of whom are children below the age of 18) in a tent given by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). During the interview conducted with her, she recalls the psychological and financial suffering she and her family faced with patience and faith, fulfilling their religious obligations during the holy month of Ramadan while living in a tent under the burning sun.

D.R says «I was crying with my children the whole time which affected their psychological status and academic performance. Fear has found a permanent place in our life, especially my eldest daughter»

MSD field researchers monitored the demolition and noted that her child, who is only 10 years, was holding a ball and crying «They have demolished our house... where will I live now?!» and Ms. D.R kept saying: “I wish that no one would experience such horrible day».
About CESIE (European Centre of Studies and Initiatives)

CESIE is engaged in growth and development through the active involvement of people, civil society institutions and the promotion of diversity. CESIE – European Centre of Studies and Initiatives – is a non-profit and independent European non-governmental organisation. It was established in 2001, inspired by the life and work of the leading Italian sociologist Danilo Dolci (1924-1997). The organisation works towards the promotion of cultural, educational, scientific and economic development at both local and international levels through the employment of innovative and participative tools and methodologies. CESIE’s coordination office can be found in the city centre of Palermo, and has five operative offices in Egypt, India, Malta, Nepal and Senegal. Moreover, CESIE coordinates the CESIE Federation, composed of over 70 organisations around the world sharing their mission.

The Objectives of CESIE:

CESIE aims to promote intercultural dialogue; support social inclusion and equal opportunities; facilitate lifelong education and vocational training; foster responsible and supportive global development; develop and support networking at local and international levels; and encourage international cooperation.

In the framework of competencies and the sector of intervention described above, the partnership between MSD and CESIE fits perfectly within the gender equality project. The prioritisation of women’s rights is a necessary element for the overall development of all sectors of society. Issues of gender equality should be considered and addressed in all areas of policy development. This is most important in those countries where the realisation of gender equality has been slow to develop and women’s rights are not prioritised and lack adequate protection. Since they are aware of the challenges to be faced in improving the status of women, CESIE and MSD have developed an intervention strategy, which identifies the project in question as only the first step in a series of interventions on these issues, related to the protection of human rights. The partners utilise the tool of intercultural dialogue as a means to achieve overall development in the Palestinian territories.
According to international law, men and women are to be considered as equal; unfortunately this provision is never fully achieved in reality. Those who are concerned with women’s issues know that women still suffer from discrimination. In employment for instance, some companies still do not give equal salaries to men and women who carry out the same job and have the same qualifications. Women are discriminated not only in society but also within the family. In another example some women are deprived of education and inheritance on the basis that she is considered to be the weaker group who can be easily oppressed and violated.

A number of international organizations have been established to defend women’s rights in general and eliminate gender discrimination. These organizations work intensively to enact laws and regulations to ensure that women can access and realize all of the guaranteed basic rights.

One example is the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which aims to eliminate oppression and discrimination against women.

CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women)
How was CEDAW’s convention formed?

In November 1967, the general assembly adopted the declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. After five years, UN secretary general called on the Commission on the Status of Women to find an international solution for the situation of women. In 1974, the commission began drafting the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. In 1977, The General Assembly assigned 23 experts to prepare the draft.

The convention adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18/12/1979 is composed of a preamble and 30 articles related to gender equality and women’s rights in all areas. The convention strives to ensure real gender equality and directs states to take active steps to realize this goal. One of the way state parties are expected to do this is through the introduction of legislation governing equality in the areas of politics, economics, society, culture, health and family areas, these laws should protect women in both public and private spheres. The convention calls on state parties to the convention to recognize women’s economic and social role within the family and stresses that discrimination hinders economic development. The convention affirms the necessity to raise the awareness of both men and women of gender equality. Only through highlighting and providing information on the rights and obligations of all parties and individuals, can prejudices and traditional stereotypical views and practices can be altered.

Article 1 of the Convention: “For the purpose of the present Convention, the term ‘discrimination against women' shall mean at any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”.

According to Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without
distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

The convention obliges state parties to take tangible steps to eliminate discrimination against women, through the integration of gender equality into their national constitution, the introduction of other necessary legislation as well as the elimination of all national judicial provisions discriminating against women.

The convention is aware of the role culture, customs and habits can play in defending discrimination and unfair treatment of women. Thus, the convention asks the states parties to eliminate all stereotypical roles assigned to each gender in addition to fighting all forms of trafficking and the exploitation of women.

Also, the convention obliges states to take suitable measures to eliminate discrimination against women in politics, as well as enabling them to participate in political parties, unions, associations, committees or political NGOs.

The convention gives women the right to obtain nationality or change it or keep it as well as equal rights concerning her children’s nationality.

It also calls on the elimination of discrimination in the area of education, it states that discrimination, either in law or in practice, in all areas of education must be addressed, and any barrier to female engagement with the education system be removed. This is done through encouraging mixed education and decreasing rate of female early school leavers.

It obliges the states to ensure protection and promotion of the women’s right to choose a job, have equal salary, have adequate health protection, experience personal safety, enjoy special protection during pregnancy and paid maternity leave without losing her job.