

**SECURITY COUNCIL ARRIA FORMULA MEETING**

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First I would like to thank you and particularly Ambassador Kolby from Norway for giving us this opportunity to meet with you, and we would also like to thank Equality Now for making that opportunity possible.

We come from two communities that have very much been shaped by action or inaction of the U.N. through its various resolutions and their implementation or lack of implementation.

The U.N. was created specifically to coordinate international efforts to promote world peace. It was created so that various nation states will take responsibility to ensure global peace and security and consequently stability. This body has translated the diverse human experience in conflict and conflict resolution into an intricate body of laws and related instruments for implementation to control behaviour of governments and ensure the much highly regarded global security.

In the body of the U. N. there is no shortage of laws and regulations that deal with conflict and conflict resolution, and in the context of the Middle East there is no shortage of resolutions that have been adopted to guide the resolution of the conflict. What is left is really the political will of governments to undertake their responsibility according to their mandate within the body of international law and international humanitarian law.

The absence of political will has kept Middle East societies and particularly the Palestinian society lingering too long in a situation of perpetual fear and conflict that has and is still causing loss of dear lives, and the perpetuation of pain and suffering. The Palestinian society has been yearning for too long for peace and security. We have been yearning to be able to move around freely without having to ask permission from young gun-toting Israeli soldiers who are placed practically at our doorsteps. We have been yearning for too long for the time when we do not have to worry about our children and particularly our teenaged male children going back and forth safely to school. We have been yearning for too long to be able to run our political and economic lives without the constraints of occupation. We have been yearning for the need for security where we do not have to worry about being thrown in jail for exercising our right of self-expression and self-determination. All the things that are taken for granted in other societies we cannot even begin to dare to think what life would be like exercising those rights.

In spite of all the constraints we have been living under due to the occupation, our hopes and aspirations did not stop us from trying to struggle for issues of social justice within our own society. As a representative of Palestinian civil society and the women's movement, I can say that in spite of all the handicaps, with a lot of support from the

various UN bodies and bi-lateral aid we have gone a long way in developing our various institutions in order to address social needs, from health, education, legislation etc. with the hope that whenever the Palestinian state that is much hoped for and talked about comes about we will be well set in the process of development of our various, political, economic, social and cultural institutions. The Palestinian women's movement has succeeded in making inroads in addressing cultural values and attitudes particular to the Arab world that handicap the healthy development of girls and women. We Palestinian women were in the process of engaging ourselves in legislative development at the local as well as the international levels. Our representatives participated in the various U.N. conferences and other international conferences related to women. We were witnessing the development of a budding but vibrant young feminist movement, an essential sector for democratic development within the Palestinian society.

However, the last so-called Israeli re-occupation of Palestinian controlled areas has manifested itself in the systematic destruction of all that we have been able to achieve in the last ten years at the level of infrastructure development with the aim to dash any hope for a coherent Palestinian state and identity.

Honorable representatives, our society is a vibrant society. We have managed to sustain ourselves and survive extreme hardships for over fifty years. The last onslaught has done nothing but to strengthen the determination of the national collective not only to survive but also to overcome the present hardships. Survive as a nation we will, however, the short and long term consequences of the last military onslaught is yet to be evaluated and assessed. The negative consequences of the prolongation of this conflict will not only be felt by our society, but by the Israeli society as well because we are living at such proximity to each other.

In the eyes of the average Palestinian, our society was effectively left at the mercy of a hostile state that continually violated, and with impunity, almost every law in the book regarding the behaviour of states in armed conflict throughout the Israeli illegal and endless occupation. They did that through the continued confiscation of land, building of settlements, transfer of their own civilian population into the occupied territories, willful destruction of property, illegal removal of prisoners from their own territories, and the list goes on. You probably have long detailed reports of the various systematic abuses and violations. Having no effective Palestinian state to defend our interests, nor an effective international third party to ensure the respect of the law, desperate elements in Palestinian society felt they had no choice but to resort to their own means for self-defense. The continued violations of every principle and law that deals with the conflict by the state of Israel have resulted with a likewise violent and illegal response by Palestinian non-state actors. This cycle of action and reaction has allowed the Israeli state in the name of self defense to use formal state military strategies and means against non-state actors, leading to a level of violence that must be contained if not to preserve life, at least to ensure regional and global stability, because the Palestinian community feels at present that it has nothing more to lose, besides the clear understanding that the political objectives of this military campaign is to break the spirit of the Palestinian community and accept an imposed agreement which is not an agreement at all.

In the face of the high cost to life, and the concern of even worse scenarios of blood letting and destruction, to the point of concern that the extreme right wing elements within the existing Israeli Government will seize the opportunity of a regional conflict to carry out their widely spoken-about transfer of the Palestinian population to Jordan, strong elements in both our societies some of which we represent urge you to take immediate action to save life and give hope to the young generation. Tomorrow the U.N. will be undertaking the Children's Summit and children of the Middle East have the right to hope for a better future. Young Palestinian teenagers are increasingly turning their bodies into walking bombs believing that this will advance the cause of their community, and in the same token we also see one generation after the other of young Israelis having to serve in the army because their consequent governments have lead them to believe that holding on to the territories, maintaining the illegal occupation and controlling the lives of the Palestinian population is necessary for their own security. Young people should not be subjected to an environment like this, which makes them feel they have no future and no alternatives.

The Security Council in its mandate has a responsibility for direct intervention, and has responsibility to ensure the enforcement of the various U.N. resolutions. By acting on its mandate, the Security Council will give some hope for a better future, some hope to lead towards constructive dialogue.

For the sake of preserving life, and for the sake of making political negotiations possible, it is essential to create an environment of hope by sending immediately international peacekeeping forces with a mandate of protection. Any future negotiations must remain under international auspices to ensure the respect of the international frameworks. The two parties, Palestinian and Israeli are not equal, and should not be left on their own, otherwise the imbalance of power will dictate the process, which characterized the Oslo negotiation process that we are now witnessing the bloody consequences of.

Honourable representatives, peace is made between peoples and not between leaders. A process that should lead to a political solution that is sustainable and consequently permanent should be just, and should not be left to the confines of the generals, and should be transparent to the relevant societies. We have to address and understand each other's history with an open mind. If we leave it only to men we get Israeli generals and Palestinians who will not be defeated and there is no room to negotiate. Our leaders have a responsibility to educate as a matter of policy each other's societies about the other. Through the suggested forthcoming peace conference, the U.N. must take an active role to ensure that there is sufficient representation of civil society and particularly representatives of peace groups within both societies as they will have a vested interest in thinking of creative means to overcome obstacles.

The participation of women in any future peace process is essential to maintain connection to the realities of the relevant societies and their yearnings for peace and security. Women have proven themselves to be more dedicated to the process of reaching out which is essential to peace making. However, women need to be

empowered to be able to participate in such processes, and frameworks must be developed to ensure their participation.

In the planning of the forthcoming peace conference we call upon you to ensure the participation of representatives of civil society as well as women's groups at both the parties of the conflict level as well as the third party level. We cannot afford to waste any more time, or any more lives. We need to think of a new approach. We as women want to bring a new understanding to the situation in the Middle East. We want to approach peace-building in a way that will promote long-term stability. We want to explain to each other what it is like to live in Israel and Palestine, to develop transparent procedures so that any peace will be one between individuals and not politicians. But we cannot do it alone. We are asking for your help and the help of the international community both to give us a chance to contribute our expertise and our knowledge and to support us in our efforts. Women are a strong and resourceful people. We want to use our strength and resourcefulness to help bring peace to the Middle East.

Finally, I would like to conclude that despite all the disappointments and setbacks experienced lately, it is important not to give up on the region and to capitalize on the strong desire and need that exists in both societies for security and stability to take bold actions that give hope. We have witnessed even in our recent history societies that were bitter enemies, who were able to work out their relationship and live with each other or next to each other in peace and harmony. If peaceful co-existence has been successful in other societies it should be possible in the Middle East as well. The rule of law is essential for this peace and harmony. We have to replace the rule of force, which has governed our region for too long, with the rule of law, and this is your challenge. Women know instinctively that the use of force will never lead to peace, justice or even security.

We hope you will think about creative ways in which you can bring women in to the process. 50% of the representatives of all parties to peace negotiations should be women, and we urge you to explore other means as well – perhaps the creation of a women's commission, for example. We leave it to you – there are many ways in which this could be done.