International Women's Day is a day to champion women and highlight their achievements. It is also a day to assess the world’s progress on women’s rights especially that this year marks 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the world’s commitment to achieving gender equality.

Unfortunately, despite the progress that many countries have made over the years, this progress remains minimal and we still have a long way to go to reach our goal of living in a world that promotes equality for all. This is especially true for Palestine as women still face many challenges on a daily basis.

Women in Palestine are the most vulnerable under the Israeli military occupation. According to Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association (ADDAMEER), 43 Palestinian women are currently in Israeli prisons including eight injured and 12 sick women requiring medical attention, and 16 mothers. In addition, four women are under administrative detention languishing in prison without charge or trial. Female prisoners are treated no differently than their counter male prisoners as they are subjected to the same degree of physical and mental torture.

Women in Palestine face political, legal, social and economic restrictions despite the fact that the State of Palestine had joined several international conventions and treaties pertaining to women’s rights. This includes the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without any reservation to any of its articles. It is unfortunate that the Palestinian government has failed to adapt its legislation to the international standards in this regard leaving women to suffer the consequences. Women in the West Bank and Gaza not only suffer from high unemployment rate, and a gap in daily wages, but they are also excluded from participation on all levels of decision-making starting from their own.
households and up to the political arena. Just as an example, the current Palestinian government consists of only three appointed female ministers as opposed to 19 male ministers.

A culture of masculinity and male domination has encouraged the phenomenon of gender-based violence in the Palestinian society. The Personal Status Law continues to discriminate against women including in relation to marriage, divorce, custody, and guardianship of children and inheritance. Women’s organizations and women’s rights activists have been demanding the adoption of the Family Protection Bill for over 15 years, yet the bill remains at a standstill, going from one ministry to another. The absence of deterrent laws to protect women has resulted in the prevalence of gender-related killings. According to Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, four women have been killed in the West Bank and Gaza since the beginning of 2020 and 24 women were killed in 2019.

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security reaffirms the important role of women in peace-building and conflict resolution and urges member states to increase and support women’s participation in “all United Nations peace and security efforts”. It also “calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.” Yet, Palestinian women continue to suffer and pay the price of the lack of accountably for Israel’s crimes against humanity and the absence of the political will of the Palestinian leadership to hold perpetrators of crimes accountable in compliance with international law.

The YWCA of Palestine calls on the international community to take all measures to hold Israel accountable for its human rights violations and to end the occupation. We also hold the Palestinian government accountable for women’s suffering and call on them to abide by their international obligations and undertake actions required for compliance with CEDAW and all other international conventions pertaining to women’s rights that they have endorsed.

We strongly believe that gender-equality cannot be achieved until all women in the world have access to equal basic rights. The international community has an obligation to put utmost efforts into making this world a better place for all. It is our collective responsibility globally to support each other as women and women’s organizations to build a world where safety and peace have a chance!

*Happy International Women’s Day to all women in Palestine and around the world!*