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Risk and Security for Women in Israel/Palestine

-A report prepared in February 2010

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1. Introduction

Women for Peace is an organization without affiliation to any political or religious associations or parties, working for peace on the conditions stipulated by women. We are working for solidarity between women across all borders, and as part of this, we have been engaged in various projects in Palestine. We also participate in "Women in Black" manifestations in both Stockholm and Uppsala.

"Women in Black" is a peace organization protesting against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. As a result of our work in Iraqi Kurdistan we have also become aware of substantial knowledge gaps in Sweden concerning violence in the Middle-East, including honour-related violence. We have also come to understand that many public authorities and organizations in Sweden are unaware of the difficulties and the resistance that apply for those who are working for women's security in Israel/Palestine. As a result, we think we have much to learn, and this is also the background for our application for funding to conduct a fieldtrip and write a report based on this. We would also like to clarify that this report should not be regarded as scientific. We are merely report the interviews that we conducted with several key persons in the relevant organizations in Israel/Palestine - mainly NGOs working with women's rights, protection and safety. The aim of the report is that it should be simple in design so that authorities and organizations in Sweden and in Israel/Palestine can easily access it and that the participating organizations can use it in their practical activities.

We have performed thirteen interviews with various key persons in Israel/Palestine. The interviews have been carried out by means of a pre-constructed questionnaire (see appendix), and we have adapted the questions to the activities of the organizations concerned. Our selection of interviewees has been both directed and random. Since we had scheduled appointments before the trip, other appointments were arranged after our arrival. The selection of interview participants has been dependent on aspects of time, geographical location and which people had time to participate. The common denominator of the participating organizations is that they are working for and are committed to the vital conditions of women's lives. We have also raised questions regarding HBTQ, since HBTQ

persons are also subjected to honour-related violence and oppression and are a particularly vulnerable group. The interviews have been recorded on Mp3 and then transcribed and compiled. We have based the transcription on the participants' own words, and summarized what they said in the interviews. As far as possible, we have tried not to interpret or make additions, but remain true to the source. This means that some things that might be perceived as offensive are the participants' own words and not the authors' viewpoints. It should also be added that we have used an interpreter and interpreted some of the material ourselves. We ask for your tolerance in this respect.

It is important to bear in mind that Israel/Palestine is a society influenced by conflict, where militarism and violence are common features of everyday life. The mitigating legislation, regarding honour killings in the Palestinian-dominated areas, makes honour-related violence relatively common there. These areas are characterized by gender segregation, a high degree of sexual moralism, and women cannot move freely in society. In our interviews we deal with several subjects that are considered taboo and this is, of course, reflected in the answers we have received. In general, we think that the informants have been very courageous and outspoken and helpful and supportive in all possible ways. This knowledge is of great benefit to both the organizations in Sweden and Israel/Palestine, and also in other parts of the world.

The division of chapters is as follows: introduction to Israel/Palestine, the violence situation with regard to preventive work, the emergency situation and follow-up, the situation for HBTQ (Homosexual, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer) persons and analysis. There is also a brief presentation of the organizations participating (see appendix).

2. Israel/Palestine

2.1 Introduction¹

The present Palestinian and Israeli territories were historically parts of the British mandate Palestine, which the British captured in 1917 from Ottoman Turkey. In the same year, Great Britain promised in the Balfour Declaration that it would assist the Zionist movement by establishing a Jewish home in Palestine. The Declaration met with strong reactions from the Palestine Arabs.

In 1922, Palestine became a British mandate under The League of Nations and Jewish immigration continued, but escalated in connection with the persecution of the Jews in Germany during the Hitler period in the 1930s. This led to increased tension between Jews and Arabs, and gradually two economies emerged in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. In 1947, Great Britain transferred the Palestine issue to the United Nations², whose General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, declaring that Palestine should be divided into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jewish state would constitute 55 per cent of the landmass of Palestine and the Arabic state would cover the remaining 45 per cent of the landmass, while Jerusalem would be placed under UN governance. The Jews accepted the resolution but not the Palestinians or the Arab states, who instead suggested a democratic "unitary state".

In connection with the formation of the Jewish state of Israel that was formed in 1948, the first of several wars broke out between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. The first war ended in 1949 with Israel taking control of 77 per cent of the former Palestinian mandate and 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from Israeli territories to neighbouring Arab countries. This is called al-nakba - the great catastrophe. After the 1948-1949 war, the Palestinian areas - Gaza and the West Bank - were to be governed by Egypt and Jordan. Prior to the Six-Day War, the West Bank was part of Jordan, but was subsequently formally under Jordanian control until 1988, when Jordan renounced all claims. The Six-Day War between Israel and neighbouring countries broke out in 1967 and resulted in the conquest of Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula by Israel from Egypt, and the takeover of the West Bank from Jordan, and also eastern Jerusalem. These areas were placed under Israeli military rule. In the same year, the UN adopted Resolution 242, demanding a retreat from all occupied territories. Following the Six-Day War, the Palestinian guerrilla movements took over the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), with al-Fatah and Yassir Arafat in the lead. The movement's aim was to obliterate the Jewish state and pave the way for Palestinian refugees to return to

their homes.

In October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel, but this was effectively countered. In 1974, the Arab states acknowledged PLO as the only legal representative of the Palestinian people. The victory of the right wing Israeli Likud party in the elections led to the establishment of new settlements in occupied territories. During 1978, the first Camp David agreements were reached to create a framework for peace. This led to a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Egypt regained the Sinai area, and Israel controlled large areas of the West Bank by means of the settlement policies. This led to feelings of considerable frustration amongst the Palestinians and a Palestinian uprising, the first Intifada, which began in 1987. Israel responded with collective punishment through deportations, blowing up houses and curfews. Israel no longer allowed Palestinians to move freely between Gaza and the West Bank.

The Oslo Accords in 1993 were an agreement in principle for limited Palestinian self-governance on the West Bank and in Gaza until a Palestinian state could be formed. Israel recognized PLO for the first time as representative of the Palestinian people and PLO formally recognized Israel's right to exist within safe borders. Yassir Arafat, the PLO leader created a national Palestinian authority, which also included a police force. Various opponents on both sides made attempts to sabotage the peace process by means of suicide bombings and massacres, but despite this progress was made until the Israeli Prime Minister, Rabin, was assassinated in 1995 by a religious-nationalistic Jew. The right wing once again won the elections in Israel in the following year, and the settlements continued to expand. The election in 1999 was won by the Labour party and Ehud Barak. New peace negotiations took place at Camp David with Barak, Arafat and the US President, Bill Clinton, but the negotiations collapsed. Barak lost the election in 2000 and the right wing (Likud) leader Ariel Sharon, who earlier the same year had triggered the second Intifada by visiting the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, was victorious.

Fruitless attempts to achieve peace

After Sharon's victory, large-scale military attacks against the Palestinian areas were conducted in 2002, as a response to a series of Palestinian suicide attacks. The West Bank was re-occupied by Israel and demands were made for Arafat to renounce terrorism. Some fruitless attempts to establish peace were made. One of these was the "Road Map for Peace" in which Sharon and the recently elected Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, participated. The two Palestinian Islamist movements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, continued their suicide-bombings. As a result, Israel started to build a "security barrier" towards the West Bank, predominantly on Palestinian soil. The Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas continued to grow. The Palestinian government had problems with corruption, lawlessness and anarchy. President Yassir Arafat died in 2004 and Mahmoud Abbas took over the leadership of PLO. Abbas won the presidential election in January 2005. Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not participate.

In August and September of 2005, Israel evacuated Gaza and over 8,000 Jewish settlers were evacuated. In early 2006, tensions rose in Israeli-Palestinian relations because the Hamas Islamist resistance movement beat the ruling al-Fatah party in the elections. Palestinians were discontented with the corruption of al-Fatah and its inability to maintain law



One of the major issues, dividing the Israelis and the Palestinians, is who has the right to the Temple Mount. The Dome of the Rock can be seen in the background, with the Wailing Wall in front. The Wailing Wall is divided into two areas; one for men and one for women.

and order. After Israel left Gaza, Hamas and Fatah supporters fought each other and eventually Hamas ended up in control of the area. The political fighting led to a non-functioning government and a third of the elected parliament members from Hamas, were in an Israeli prison. Rockets were launched from Gaza into Israel, which resulted in Israel sending in ground forces in 2008. Israel withdrew in the same year and a six-month truce was initiated between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The rocket attacks from Gaza, which have never really ceased, increased towards the end of the truce period and Israel once again intensified the blockade but released about 200 Palestinian refugees.

On the 27 December 2008, Israel commenced massive bombings of Hamas targets in Gaza. It was claimed that the bombings were designed to enforce cessation of the rocket attacks against Israel, and force Hamas to agree to a new, bet-

ter truce. Israel declared the area closest to Gaza a "closed military zone". Some humanitarian aid workers were allowed entry, but no journalists. The UN headquarters in Gaza was set on fire by Israeli rockets. Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire in January after the global community promised to counteract the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Over 1,300 Palestinians, of which at least 700 were civilians, had been killed at that point, and tens of thousands had become homeless. The material destruction was immense. On the Israeli side, 13 people had been killed in connection with the hostilities. In the following election, the right wing Likud party formed a government and Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel in March 2009. The internal political fighting between Fatah and Hamas continued and the negotiations between the two failed. A decision to have parliamentary elections in January of 2010 was taken, but was subsequently postponed indefinitely.

3. The situation with regard to violence

3.1 Preventive efforts

Preventive work against violence consists mainly of educating women, in general and in the women's rights area, and setting up centres at which women can receive help with problems in their lives.

The Isha L'Isha organization (Woman to Woman in Hebrew) is a feminist organization established by a group of feminists in 1983 as a result of their efforts to promote women's liberation and women's rights during the 1970s. This organization is a collective and holds large meetings once a month. Decisions are taken on a consensus basis and involve both ideological issues and matters of principle. The organization promotes, for example, a ban on the purchase of sexual services. At present they do not support the proposed legislation since it does not address the situation of women or give them protection or safety. There is no mention of women and the only thing in focus in the proposal is what is to happen to men who are prosecuted. They have taken Swedish legislation into consideration and are trying to adapt it to Israeli legislation without taking into account what the Swedish women's organizations have criticized, which has in fact, been taken into account in Swedish legislation. The current proposal in Israel states that men, when arrested, should be offered the choice of educational programmes or a six month prison sentence. Women, on the other hand - prostitutes - are not to be offered educational programmes, work or protection from further violence.

The women that Isha L'Isha are in contact with are part of the Anti-trafficking project and they are active there too. The women conduct outreach activities by going to the beaches and neighbourhoods where prostitutes are located. They are in contact with "informants" who notify them about current activities and encourage them to maintain contact with the organization. Most of the "informants" are Russian, since many women who are victims of trafficking and have travelled there involuntarily and/or been sold there are immigrants from former Eastern bloc countries. The person responsible for the project speaks Russian. They know that there are also Palestinian women and Mizrahim women³ involved. Nowadays, there is government project-funding for this work and they have a shelter in Tel Aviv as well as a counselling centre for the victims of trafficking and local prostitutes. The project invites participation by the women as the result of an outreach programme located in the areas where they can be found. They are then part of the project along with social workers. Some of the women have left prostitution and are today working on the project and are part of the management team.

There are four people working in Isha L'Isha, one main coordinator, two project coordinators and one person who deals with fund raising. Isha L'Isha is a non-hierarchical organization. Everyone is equal in the decision-making process, whether they are employees or volunteers. Organisational tasks are carried out via steering committees. Questions are raised and dealt with collectively and those who want to participate express interest. Everyone can sign up for the issues in which they are interested. Steering committees deal with the issue to which they are as-

signed and follow-up work that has been carried out. This involves feminist education, education in schools and the security situation in the area.

Women in Israel feel enormous pressure from society when it comes to being forced to give birth to children, to become mothers. They are pressurized into having children before anything else. Some women would choose artificial insemination or year-long hormone treatment rather than adopt children. Egg donations are illegal in Israel, but nonetheless there is a market for purchasing eggs⁴. Mainly young female students sell their eggs. First they receive hormone treatment to increase the production of eggs, and then they are transported abroad where the eggs are removed from their ovaries and transplanted to infertile Israeli women or women in India who give birth to children for Israeli families. There is a market for this since the people who perform the procedures do not care how many eggs they are extracting and are not concerned about the well-being of the woman in question. Google baby⁵ is a famous documentary dealing on being a surrogate mother and the use of poor women in other countries. The childless couple buys the surrogate mother online.

There is a legislative proposal to permit egg cell donations which will probably be adopted. However, there is still a long way to go before this happens, not the least for religious reasons. It will be difficult to determine the child's heritage and whether the child is Jewish or non-Jewish if it has been fertilized artificially. The organization is in favour of this legislation and also wants it to include lesbian women's right to egg donations, both as givers and receivers. They also want to ensure, through legislative regulations, that the woman is allowed freedom to choose. There is a question of whether selling your eggs is a free choice if you do it in order to pay for your studies. They also want to ascertain how selling eggs affects the women's health and ensure that the legal aspects are included in the equation. The media is strictly controlled. When the organization tried to spread information about the egg donations, it was presented in the television spot in a completely different fashion that promoted motherhood (which is considered sacred and untouchable), rather than giving women in need the help they crave. The staff of Isha L'Isha were shocked by the TV-programme.



Motherhood, or the ability to have children, is a very important aspect of the Israeli identity, especially amongst the Orthodox Jews. The picture shows Russian-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem.



Military service is obligatory for both men and women in Israel. However, men are often stationed in more exposed positions, while women are often deployed as medics or in similar non-combatant duties involving more "feminine" tasks. The picture is from a military parade at the Wailing Wall: weapons are positioned by the table.

Hot-line for raped women

Isha L'Isha's early work targeted sexual harassment, rape and other types of violence against women and the organization decided to do something about it. They began by starting a hot-line for women in need of help. Eventually this evolved into voluntary work for organizations of volunteers and NGOs working in this field. They became more specialized in certain issues and also became more adaptable and less extreme, having started as a radical feminist movement. The women's shelters developed in the same way. They started with the same non-hierarchical structure, thinking that the men who were abusive should be put in shelters instead of the women. They transformed from a pure NGO into a more professional organization. The victims of violence now receive excellent emotional and legal support at the shelters.

As in the case of other NGOs, the organization experiences that fund contributors are concerned that they may be a certain political standpoint, such as strongly criticizing the current government apparatus. This sometimes has economic consequences for the organization. As a result, they prefer to enlist foreign NGOs such as Isha L'Isha or NGOs without any government affiliation who support their own ideological standpoint. The organization often gives lectures. For example the "Stop trafficking project" is often out giving lectures to the police in which they tell the trainee police what prostitutes and victims of trafficking have been through and how it affects them as human beings. The political support has mainly consisted of individual members of Knesset⁶, who have given the organizational activities major support. The tasks of the organization are

based on research, which the politicians appreciate. When it comes to egg donations for example, they conducted a two year- study before delivering their response to the politicians.

Another issue that Isha L'Isha has studied closely was a form of contraception, a so-called birth control injection, mainly given to Ethiopian women who were guest workers in the country. The background was that a social worker noticed that baby clothes that were to be handed out in certain areas to those who needed them, were not required in an area with Ethiopian guest workers. They had not had any children for three years in the area. The social worker then contacted the organization, which started to look into the matter. At the same time the social worker started talking to the women in the area and found out that all the women of child-bearing age that she came into contact with received birth control injections. They were given an injection by a doctor every three months. Similar studies, as in the case of the coloured population in the US, Jewish women from the Eastern bloc and parts of the third world have shown a higher degree of the use of birth control injections.

They did not receive information on the alternatives and, if there are no alternatives, this is not a free-will choice. The doctor defended this by saying that the women from Ethiopia were more used to receiving injections, but upon investigation it turned out that the women from Ethiopia were more used to pills rather than injections. The organization received information from Jewish recruiting agencies and other agencies in Ethiopia that it was difficult to raise children in Israel and therefore the women should use this method when they were working in Israel. As a result, the

organization started a study in which they interviewed the women, but this was not easy since contraception is seen as a personal and sensitive subject. The organization then discovered several side effects such as bleeding and pain throughout the whole period of using the contraceptive. The reports are summarized in an easy accessible version for European women's organizations. The next step is to bring this up as a major issue of ethical principle involving racism in medical science. The women concerned must have alternatives.

Leyla Mozzali⁷ has prepared a report entitled "The weapon on the kitchen table" about the importance of having a home free of weapons, based on the widespread abuse and criminal acts caused by weapons in the home. Military service is mandatory for both women and men and they are personally responsible for their weapons and take them home during their periods of leave. She carried out a study on women who had been killed by their male partners during recent years, and noted that in many cases where women were shot by their husbands, the husbands were often employed as security guards, military personnel, police etc. Weapons are very accessible in society and they have to take their weapons home after work. Therefore a new organization called New Profile has been launched in Israel. This organization is propagating a demilitarized Israel. Today, Israel is a militarized country.

Isha L'Isha does not deal much with the question of honour-related violence since they say this is more prevalent within Palestinian areas, and therefore this is something that the Palestinian organizations are working with. The reason that honour-related violence is more common in Palestinian society is because it is more patriarchal and traditional since there is discrimination against Palestinians in Israeli society and they remain poor. That is why the traditions remain. Without pointing out a specific ethnic group, the interview participant says that honour-related violence does exist and the problem has deteriorated.

Three religious courts in addition to the civil courts

There are three religious courts and a civil court in Israel. The three religious courts consist of one Jewish, one Christian and one Muslim. You can choose what court to go to, religious or civil. The court you turn to first is the one where the proceedings will take place, for example if a couple is to file for divorce and one person goes to the Christian court first and later the other one goes to the civil court, the Christian court will have precedence over the civil court. Most religious courts are in favour of men, since they are based on belief, religion and irrational reasoning. According to the interview participant at Isha L'Isha, Kayan's co-workers, with whom they cooperate and share facilities (more information about Kayan later on in the text), go with women to these religious courts and they say state that visiting the religious courts is like going back 100 years in time. When Kayan are participating the religious leaders try to be less chauvinistic, which is not always the case. They know that when Kayan is present the case might end up in the media or be transferred to other courts. There are also other problems since only Hebrew is spoken in the civilian court, while the others also use Arabic. The process is quicker and easier in the religious courts and you do not need a lawyer, but can go there and speak for yourself. The advantage is that your income is irrelevant, but the disadvantage is that they treat women unfairly. The civil court would be better for women if it were free, with a free interpreter and a free lawyer.

The women who get into contact with Isha L'Isha need legal counselling, and they need someone to accompany

them to court. The cases usually concern child custody. Divorce, for example, is a problem in the Jewish court, where the woman can be refused a divorce by her husband. The man can still remarry and start a new family, but the woman cannot as long as she is refused divorce. It is not uncommon that the man pressures his wife for money, a way for her to buy her freedom from the marriage. Sometimes the Jewish court encourages the woman to do as the man says, even if what he is doing is wrong. It is a corrupt system in which the man has to give his approval. In the civil court, no one would ask the man for his permission - the court would make the decision.

According to Isha L'Isha and Kayan, it should be possible to choose which court to use, but often women are forced to go to the religious courts for different reasons. The religious court, at least the Jewish one, rules over the period of the wedding process, throughout the marriage and until death. If the couple are married in accordance with the Jewish tradition, they have to divorce in a Jewish court even if they are completely secular in their way of life and their opinions. There is an organization that tries to help women who have been refused divorce which has prepared a document that the couple sign before they marry making the man unable to refuse divorce, if it comes to that. In synagogues in the United States, this is sometimes a part of the ceremony and many women use it today.

Isha L'Isha cooperates with everyone who shares their ideology and they are happily participating in coalitions in various forms, like Resolution 1325, HBTQ groups, work in certain areas, political lobbying, Women for Peace, the security situation in Israel, etc. The activism and goals of the coalition are the deciding factor. Every project contains studies, research and surveys. The organization has a large library where all feminist activism and research is archived, and it is frequently used by others. In a short-term perspective they want to continue to work as a multicultural centre for women. Men are welcome to participate and support activism but they are not allowed to participate in the decision-making process in the collective. The general oppression of Palestinians and Jewish women from Eastern Europe must also cease. The long term goal is for the existence of Isha L'Isha to be unnecessary.

Kayan

Kayan was established in 1998 by Palestinian women living in Israel. The legal department in Haifa was started in 2004-2005. The organization's aim is to change the position of women in society, as women, as Israelis, as Arabs - in other words as citizens. It operates both by influencing decision makers and by trying to influence the Arab group. The organization was established by a group of grassroots activists, who were training other women in empowerment⁸ and also running courses in women's rights and providing legal counselling. Kayan, operating in Haifa has consultation regarding honour-related violence and HBTQ persons. It gives the victim different alternatives - if the woman's life is threatened she can go to a shelter for protection. They give those who are under considerable threat, for example lesbians, the opportunity to go abroad and change their identities, but Kayan does not make this decision for them. There are NGOs abroad helping them and taking care of women who need to escape.

Kayan does not work with the family that is the source of the threats, since it does not have the ability or the staff resources to do so. Sometimes, a woman wants someone to go and negotiate with the family and, in such cases, a social worker does this. Social workers are state employees

who have undergone training for this purpose. Kayan does not want to accept the definition of "honour" even it does not want to ignore the problem. According to the interview participant, an increasing number of women are being killed and this is an international problem which cannot be linked to Arab society. They are killed because they are women and because they are weaker than men. Husbands kill wives in all societies. There is a difference and that is the reason for killing women. A European woman is seldom killed for having sex with her boyfriend.

The reason that Kayan does not want use the term "honour killings" is because this concept is employed by the Israeli state against the Arab population. It is an internal issue, but the interview participant did not want to discuss it further. According to the interview participant, both Europeans and the Israeli state blame the Arab population and Palestinians by claiming that they are killing their women, or saying that they are uneducated, and retarded; there is a great deal of underlying racism when they use the term "honour killings". Therefore Kayan would rather speak of women being killed for being women, even in an Arab society, and this has its roots in a patriarchal system with long-standing roots. Women who do not follow the road paved for them by men are punished by being killed. According to the interview participant, all forms of discrimination against women have their roots in this kind of structure. Honour-related violence is about the men in the family controlling the sexuality of the woman, the way she behaves and who she is to marry. Even when it comes to violence between partners, this involves controlling the woman, since it is often the man who kills the woman.

Civil law in Israel is satisfactory as regards murder and violence within the family. In an Arab society, men who commit violent acts against women are punished, but different sentences are administered. When the murder is committed within the woman's own family, with several people involved, the case is most often dismissed with no consequences. When it is an honour-related murder there is no proof, and the crime cannot be proven. In practice, this means that honour-related cases are treated separately and are often not being brought to trial at all due to lack of evidence. No religious law allows honour killings. This means that if a woman is murdered the case will automatically go to the civil court, since it is a criminal act. Criminal acts are not something that the religious courts should handle.

Sexual relations are allowed after the age of 18 according to standard law; exceptions can be made down to the age of 16. The family laws, for example Islamic Sharia laws or in the Greek Orthodox Church do not address this matter as a criminal act, although it may be incorporated in the criminal legislation in countries where the religious scriptures encompass all aspects of the legislation, as in Saudi Arabia. According to Greek Orthodox marital law, a man who marries someone who is not a virgin can get a divorce for this reason. The man can send a letter to the religious court saying she is not a virgin, and he will be granted a divorce. Sharia law, however claims that the fact that a woman is not a virgin is an insufficient reason for a divorce. The issue of virginity is not something that is handled very much under family laws, but is more a social dilemma.

Divorce is hard for women

In Israel, abortion is allowed, but if it is performed without a medical cause, you have to pay for it yourself - it is not covered by medical insurance. It may be carried out privately, although this is not easy, but it is not illegal to have an abortion.



Haifa Women's Coalition is a women's centre where Isha L'Isha, Kayan and the Rape Centre share facilities.

A woman with whom Kayan was in contact wanted to have an abortion but could not afford it since she was financially dependent on her husband. The husband did not want her to have an abortion and she then chose to have the child.

Both divorce and marriage are entirely determined by the religious denominations - if you marry religiously you have to divorce religiously. An exception may be made in the case of mixed marriages, for example between a Christian and a Muslim, since they cannot marry religiously. There are differences concerning who is able to file for divorce. According to Sharia law, a woman cannot ask for divorce unless she can prove that there are severe difficulties in the marriage that make it impossible for her to live with her husband. In this case, it is just as possible for her to get a divorce as it is for the man. Catholic and Protestant divorce is impossible, it is only possible in the Greek Orthodox Church. Some people, both men and women, may convert to the Greek Orthodox religion in order to have the possibility of having a divorce. According to Kayan, the religious bodies should no longer be able to grant divorce and this should be a matter for civil legislation.

People who are 17 years old are able to marry, but Kayan is trying to change the age limit to 18. Forced marriages are against the law and are also against Sharia law and other religious laws or rules: marriages conducted without consent can be annulled. It is more of a social problem than a legal one in Israel. A woman who considers herself to have been forced to marry, and can prove it, will have this acknowledged in court. Those who marry without a marriage contract - a contract of marriage is required under Sharia laws for example - must wait until the woman is 17 years old. Polygamy does exist, but is forbidden by the Israeli state. The problem is that Sharia law permits polygamy, which means that if a man can marry a second wife. Both wives have rights under Sharia law.

It is possible to live together as partners without being married in Israel, but it is not generally accepted. As a result, not many people do this. In Israeli law, which was derived from the British, rape is illegal within marriage and the woman can go to the police and the courts, but it is still hard to prove whether sexual intercourse took place against her will. Under the religious laws, this issue does not exist and rape within a marriage is not considered possible. It is therefore a non-issue. According to the interview participant, religion should be separate from the state and legislation.

Kayan cooperates with other NGOs and human rights organizations. Sometimes it also cooperates with state authorities, but only on rare occasions. It does not have any direct international cooperation, except with an organization in Ramallah (West Bank) regarding the Christian religious courts, which are a problem. The interview participant thinks international cooperation would be difficult, since the legal system in Israel with different courts makes it problematical. This situation does not exist in modern societies like those in Europe or the US. The Israeli system is not comparable to other Arab countries either, since these countries only have religious legislation. In Israel it is a mixture. The situation is unique and even if it would help to expand horizons this would be a challenge. Kayan does not have state funding. It receives funds from Europe and the US. It would like to do research on the Christian courts that are currently completely independent of the state and without supervision. This is not the case with the Sharia courts. The interview participant thinks their work would benefit from a research link since that would grant them some kind of foundation. In conclusion, more education is necessary regarding the issues that Kayan is dealing with, both for women and for men at all levels of society. Empowerment permits long-term social change. Violence is a major problem in all societies.

The Beersheba help centre

The help centre in Beersheba is operating a cost-free phone line for everyone who needs help. The phone line is manned by 171 volunteers taking shifts. They are also running a treatment centre in Beersheba that is staffed by trained social workers with different areas of expertise and offering long-term treatment for various problems. The centre also has a department for education and a department that works in a preventive manner, arranging workshops, seminars and courses. The centre has a school and a preschool unit and it cooperates with the municipal authorities. In cases of need, it hires the services of a private shelter for women subjected to violence and threats. The educational department has run 1,434 seminars, workshops and courses. This training has been aimed at schools, as well as professionals such as policemen, lawyers and social workers who are working with people subjected to sexual abuse. The centre has also trained military and educated parental groups. Young people from the age of 13 are doing voluntary work with different tasks. They find out all they can about existing abuse and this leads to projects that they manage themselves. In the projects, different exercises regarding gender roles, attitudes etc are included; 342 groups have worked with this since 2009. There are special groups working with those who risk getting into trouble.

The final project may be a movie, music/song/poetry or informational material surrounding the study that they print and hand out in schools. All the projects are then part of an event called "White Night" - an annual event in Beersheba. On this occasion young "ambassadors" hand out information to everyone taking part in the event. All schools in Israel are included, all the way to the Negev desert (the largest area in Israel with 180 municipalities and cities), not only Beersheba. The centre receives governmental funding based on the statistics, phone lines and on how many people they manage to target with their educational projects. Government funding accounts for about 20% of the total amount. Other funding is received from various funds, private gifts and sponsoring by companies. There is some international support from the US, but less from Europe.

The centre works directly with sex education for young people but in a way that is adapted to the region. These



Sexual abuse of children occurs both in the Israeli and the Palestinian areas. This has been reported by several organizations, for example the Help Centre in Beersheba, Mehwar centre and the Rape centre in Haifa. N.B. The children in the picture have nothing to do with the text.

issues constitute a very urgent and important subject when you are in your teens. It is a very sensitive area, particularly in the south of Israel. At first they encountered resistance but, as a result of working with the municipalities they were allowed to develop their work. The centre works directly with the Arab municipalities through the governing body. Those who are in charge of the education there are Arabic speaking persons/professional from the region and they also cooperate with organizations in the area in question. They have special coordinators for more closed settlements like the Ethiopian or the Russian communities, with outreach programmes and phone services for them.

The centre also educates the military. They cover themes like how to counteract sexual harassment, what to do about it, the problems that may arise in relationships between directors or managers and subordinates, and so on. The soldiers are also informed about what to do if they get into trouble themselves and about their legal rights and where to get professional help. Certain themes such as sexual harassment and sexual abuse comprise a large part of the courses in such programmes. There is considerable reference to gender roles and, specifically, about the way women are perceived - for example, opinions about what they wear, where they go and so on. The centre works directly to break down taboos and counteract the spreading of rumours. Research is ongoing, linked to the universities, for example the Ben Gurion University.

The centre also has its own website, providing information about current projects and where it plans to develop training programmes for volunteers, youth and parents. It is a myth that women are the only victims of sexual abuse - men and children of both sexes are also targeted. In the case of the sexual abuse of children under the age of twelve, the statistics indicate that 50 per cent of the victims are boys and 50 per cent are girls. They hope that more European organizations will take an interest in their work, and they hope to exchange experience with others.

The Swedish Consulate General

The Swedish Consulate General in Jerusalem is working with various NGOs in the region in preventive actions, dealing with the emergency situation, and following up violence against women. The contacts with these NGOs are being

handled by the person responsible for NGOs at the General Consulate. The main areas of responsibility, according to the interview participant, are the private sector and civil society. The programmes are generally on the West Bank, Gaza and in Jerusalem. The work with NGOs in the region has been going on for some time and started even before the first Intifada. After the Oslo Accords in 1994, several NGOs have emerged and the new ones are more focused on gender-based violence. Previously, it was more common for the women to fight against the occupation, and it was also taboo to talk about "honour killings". As a result, many women's organizations prioritized the end of the occupation and wanted to deal with the social situation afterwards. They were, however, forced to change the order of priority and highlight other issues, and gradually social issues became a part of their agenda. Previously, the agenda was more political, but after the Oslo Accords NGOs focused more on a social agenda. The Consulate General is trying to combine these tasks, however. Support for the civil society is transferred from Swedish NGOs via Through the Consulate.

The Consulate is supporting three organizations: Diakonia, PGS⁹ and Woman to Woman Sweden. Diakonia is mostly working with rehabilitation for injured and disabled Palestinians. Amongst other things, it is helping a newly established organization called "The Start of Hope" for disabled women. PGS is giving medical aid but also, through a different organization, the Mental Health Organization, provides assistance for psychological problems. Woman to Woman is mainly supporting women's organizations working with UN Resolution 1325. It covers women's participation in the peace process and action to counter gender-based violence. Its main partners are Palestinian NGOs on the West Bank.

Some of the NGOs are affiliated to political parties. Most parties are secular and support women's organizations, but there are also Islamist women's organizations, which are conservative and trying to impose a certain type of ideology. During the last 6-8 years, Islamization in the region has increased, and Islamist women's organizations have multiplied. They are trying to focus on women's rights from an Islamic point of view but apart from that, they are not particularly ideological in their approach. Most of these organizations are in the north or the south of Israel/Palestine.

Association of Women Committees for Social Work

The AWCSW (Association of Women Committees for Social Work) organization in Ramallah is working at a grass roots level, with self-supporting courses for women in marginalized areas in order to mobilize steps towards equality of the sexes. This organization relies mostly on international funding. AWCSW has existed for about 25 years and was founded to work with equality and to build a democratic Palestinian state. There are around a hundred people involved in the organization's work and there are about one hundred local offices in all the Palestinian regions, such as Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin and Tefelt. There are also local offices in the villages working directly with women, and the organization also has operations in Gaza. The activities in Gaza are different, however since they mostly carry out social work after the second Intifada. Two of the AWCSW's offices in Gaza have been vandalized since the organization is known as an al-Fatah organization. Since the work there is mostly based upon supplying humanitarian aid service for survival, there is no opportunity to work for equality between the sexes or women's rights. Help is needed, both at the international and

local level.

AWCSW has associations in the refugee camps working, for example, with a campaign to establish awareness of human rights concerning violence against women /domestic violence. Going in without the support of the local community would entail a great risk of failure. The first activity that AWCSW has within the programme is to arrange a coordination meeting with the local community. It involves contact by the organization's coordinators with the local council and the local organizations working in the village concerned. The primary target is pillars of society. They also invite participation by the religious leaders in the village - the sheik or imam - and also the machtar (clan elder). The organization explains the purpose of the project and the villages often claim that they do not have a problem with violence against women. As a result, they think that the purpose of the project is to turn the women of the village against the men. The organization must then explain that the project not only includes violence against women but also all other forms of domestic violence; violence by fathers, violence by mothers, violence by children, violence by children against other children and violence between children in the school system.

Working with the entire community

One of the first things they do at the community level is to make a draft of a protective law that is then debated. AWCSW works with networks and lobbying to have the law approved by the municipal council. The law gives benefits to women and children in society. The programme also includes arranging workshops for men and women separately, since many of the villages do not accept mixing men and women in the same workshop. There are workshops focusing on violence and on what members of the local community can do to eliminate domestic violence. There are also workshops with parents and their children, dealing with communication within the family. The organization usually talks about the different types of violence that occur, even when there is no physical violence. One such example is when boys and girls are treated differently in everyday life. These workshops often function very well and are appreciated. They define different types of violence and in many instances people have not realized that these types of violence really are violence. For example, they are not aware of the fact that there is something called "economic violence" under which women, who are not working, are forbidden to spend money and do not receive money to enable them to be financially independent.

One way to work with this project is to put on a play for the whole village, men, women and children. Everyone is in the same room where a play about violence - the circle of violence - is performed. The organization does not deny that the Israeli occupation is a problem, but this does not mean that the man who was beaten by a soldier should go home and beat his woman, who beats the children, who beat other children in the community, and so on. That creates a circle of violence. In one of the villages, they refused to have the play performed since the women in the play were not wearing veils but also because they couldn't even consider putting men and women in the same room for the performance. It was a very religious village in the northern region, the Jenin-area, and AWCSW chose to withdraw from this location, thinking of the safety of the actors. They have never been attacked but they are very careful. They do not want to risk the actors' safety and lives and neither do they want the organization to be associated with something that creates violence. When they face resistance in the villages, they arrange another activ-



AWCSW and other organisations based on the West Bank, point out that the occupation and the presence of the Israeli soldiers contributes to the escalation of a violent situation. They emphasise that this is not the only reason. Society must be changed from within and people educated so that they understand it is wrong to use violence within families, for example when raising a child.

ity for the children, which includes winning prizes and singing friendly songs. This is a fun activity for the children and it contributes to additional awareness about good ways to play in order to vent frustrations. In one case, in a village outside Ramallah, the villagers refused to mix boys and girls so the boys were sent home and the girls were able to do the activities since they usually have fewer opportunities to take part in activities than the boys.

There are only two activities in which men and women, or boys and girls are jointly involved in the programme. In all the other activities, the men and women and the boys and girls are separated from each other. They also have activities in which AWCSW works with the department of bar Okauf, which is the religious department that makes sure that the Friday sermon deals with family relations. Every year the department sends out a memo proclaiming which Friday they are supposed to give a sermon about violence in family relations. This also includes the churches since they are working in some Christian villages. The results of the project are then manifested since there are committees in the villages which, in turn, send reports back to the organization documenting activities in the villages.

According to AWCSW, all religions emphasise the importance of family relations. Islam is very clear about how these relations are supposed to work and how they are to be handled. AWCSW avoids using concepts such as “violence against women” or “violence against children” but instead it refers to domestic violence and that this is a national issue. AWCSW does not deny that the occupation by Israeli troops is a major contributory factor, but the troops are not solely to blame. Society also has to change, for example the way in which children are brought up. What sons see at home affects how they are going to treat their wives and if a man is beating his wife and his daughter sees it, she will suffer as well. But she will be able to break the pattern since she has learned how to act.

The problem of honour killings is that the area has been governed by civil laws as from 1967. What was allowed at that time cannot be changed until the law has changed. The mentality of the inhabitants is entwined in these laws. Jordan, for example, has changed its laws but Palestine has not, and even if the laws change it will be difficult to implement them. UNICEF has been working to change the legislation, emphasizing and there should not be any extenuating

circumstances for honour killings. The laws should be the same as for murder.

The interview participant considers the whole idea of separating church and state to be impossible since Islam, through the Koran, tells people how to act and live. If there is a separation between church and state, that means they are no longer living under the word of Allah and must instead adapt to the word of man. A more liberal way of interpreting the Koran is called for instead - an interpretation that reflects our time and creates and approves the fatwa that describes what the religion has to say about a certain issue. According to the interview participant, they can get rid of problems and crimes related to honour. There will be resistance to this but if AWCSW tries to lobby for the separation of church and state, they will have backlashes of fundamentalism in Palestinian society. Religion will be interpreted in the strictest way possible since people will then feel that the West is going to remove their faith in God.

Education is linked to the Koran, which is in favour of the education of women. Women are the ones to raise the children and the children should have an educated mother. There are other people though who claim women should not leave the house due to their sexuality. The liberal way to understand education is as a way of escaping the poverty they are living in. According to the interview participant, women will not try to make the Palestinian society a western society just because they receive an education. Another obstacle to women's education in Palestine is that the parents do not want their daughters go through the humiliation of passing checkpoints or being harassed by Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints. As a result, they choose not to let their daughter continue her education. This may result in her not even finishing the mandatory part of her education.

The age of marriage has dropped

According to AWCSW, human rights are not a western creation and those who claim that will in the same breath claim that the Israelis are breaking human rights when it comes to the Palestinians. Human rights are important in all shapes and forms. You should be free from occupation; you should have the right to an education, the right to live and the right to be free. Women, for example, should have the right to marry whoever they want to. According to AWCSW, the average age of marriage for women rose before 2000, but then fell again due to the second Intifada due to economic hardship. A father, for example, might have problems supporting his daughters financially, and if someone in a better economic situation comes along and wants to marry his daughters, he will marry them off so that they will be better off from an economic point of view. When it comes to the statistics regarding education in all the Palestinian territories, there is a higher percentage of girls in school. In the universities and the proportion of women who study, the percentage of women is slightly higher than for men. There are possibilities for further improvement with new civil legislation. And then the situation for women will improve.

AWCSW has another programme for increasing the public dialogue for newly elected female representatives in local councils. This started with a voter's education programme and went on to strengthen and support women as part of the electoral process. AWCSW trained the women to play a larger part in the public debate. As regards cooperation with other NGOs in the area, the organization's programme deter-

mines whether AWCSW decides to invite NGOs in a related field to participate or not. AWCSW does not have any direct cooperation, however. AWCSW also works with the public authorities. They are working on empowerment of the newly elected female representatives in local or municipal councils together with the department for local governance. They are also working with the department of education to ensure that women working as teachers will get permission to leave their jobs in order to participate in the workshops. Together with the religious department, AWCSW is trying to increase awareness regarding family relations, and is working with the social department and the social bureau since AWCSW's social workers cooperate directly with the authorities if they find an especially severe case in one of the villages.

Children suffer in school

AWCSW does not have the ability to protect women or to give them the legal counselling that they need, so they refer them to WCLAC – the Women's centre for Legal Aid and Counselling. AWCSW worked with the department of education last year concerning violence in schools. The interview participant thinks it has been illegal to beat students since 1994, but there are always complaints about this and there is still a conservative attitude among some of the teachers. Though they might have had success in one village with both men and women, they may meet resistance in the next village because the coordinators are not veiled. The worst-case scenario is if a village will not allow them to enter and refuses to cooperate. That has happened once and they were forced to go to another village instead. AWCSW is quite good at gaining entry to the villages and have worked with approximately 120 villages over the last few years.

AWCSW does not have a core budget since it is working on a project basis. This creates several problems for the organization. They have one person who is responsible for fundraising, PR and programmes. They need international funding first and foremost since the government is not really able to cover their costs. The organization would like to work with Europe, especially Norway, since the Norwegians are more liberal and do not set terms for financing. Some aid organizations in the US, for example, will not give you funding if you train Hamas sympathizers in the workshops. One US aid organization gave large amounts of money to democracy workshops and when people voted for Hamas the funding was cut off. AWCSW needs stability and some concrete financing, and the organization also needs to find new ways for women to generate an income. In ten years the interview participant wants to have achieved gender equality and human rights for everyone.

According to the interviewee, none of the world religions permits violence against women or honour-related violence or crimes. As regards honour-related crimes, one should go back to religion. In Islam, it is stipulated that four persons have to have witnessed the crime of infidelity. If they educate people in that, no one would ever be convicted. It is about changing religious perceptions, not just within Islam but also within Christianity and Judaism. This is to be used to the women's advantage by claiming that the religion states that certain actions are not allowed. In Palestinian society, and in a time of conflict, more people turn to religion and in times of desperation that they do this most. The interview participant believes you can accomplish a great change through religion.

3.2 The emergency situation

The Rape Centre in Haifa was the second rape centre to be established in Israel, when it was established in 1979. The Centre in Haifa was established by a woman who had been subjected to rape herself. Then she noticed how difficult it was for her to get help from someone who understood.

The first rape centre was established in Tel Aviv and now there are a total of nine centres in the country. Initially, they were established by feminist grassroots activists, with an umbrella organization called EGO, which is working mostly with national projects concerning specific issues and cooperating with the Knesset about legislative changes. They have meetings in special committees that deal with women's issues. The southernmost centre is located in Beer-sheba, but they also cover southern parts of the country. The centre in Beersheba and in Nazareth, which is run by an Arab organization in the north handles all forms of violence against women, sexual abuse and domestic violence, while other centres only deal with sexual abuse. The most northern centre is located in Galilee. The centres are spread across the country in the larger cities, but also in strategically located smaller towns.

In Tel Aviv there is also a "hot-line" for men who have been sexually exploited and/or abused. In Jerusalem there is a "hot-line" for older religious orthodox men and also for orthodox women. When religion is involved the problem needs to be approached in a different way – it calls for a totally different attitude. These people have no way of expressing what they have been through since their religion expresses such things in a different way. Much of what is being brought up in a conversation has to be accepted by a rabbi or a religious scholar first. For example, at the centre for orthodox women there is a group of rabbis working as a team with the perpetrator to get him to cease his abuse. The women prefer not to go to the police. It is very important that there are various ways of solving problems since every society has its own special problem and solutions.

Outreach activities

At the rape centre in Haifa, there are nine employees and around sixty volunteers. They cover a large geographical area. Two women are only working with the most remote areas and have outreach activities for those who can not get to Haifa. Those who need help in contacting the police receive help from volunteers. Before they started the outreach activities, women had difficulties seeking help and getting help on their conditions. Every other year, EGO publishes statistics covering all the activities that have been conducted at all the centres. The rape centre is often the first contact the victim, or a relative of the victim, has. They try to get the victims to contact the centre themselves, but without pressuring them. The person seeking help can talk completely anonymously to the centre and therefore many women prefer to get help through the centre rather than through the authorities. The help-line phone is open around the clock at

all times throughout the year. The rape centre makes it clear that it does not give any therapeutic assistance to the victims, but is merely starting the process and helping the victims to get further contacts. The crucial task is to listen to the women and the fact that the staff are women themselves. They never give any specific advice but give suggestions for alternative ways of acting so the women can choose themselves whether to follow or dismiss these solutions. It is important to point out that the people themselves have the solution and are capable of doing something i.e. empowerment.

When the perpetrator is a police or military employee, this is considered to be special circumstances. If the abuse, for example, takes place in the army the matter is handled by the army if both the parties involved are associated with the army. If the perpetrator is a civilian, this is dealt with by a regular court. There are also "hot-lines" for women within the army. In most cases, the crime took place a long time ago. In many cases it is a matter of childhood abuse and rarely emergency cases. Many of the cases of sexual abuse take place within the family. The rape centre draws a line at thirteen to fourteen years old for their services. In the case of younger persons they refer to other organizations working with children. In cases within the family, the centre functions as a counsellor for both relatives and social workers. The rape centre states that, regardless of who is applying for help, they are forced to report it if it involves a child. Recently they were in contact with a fantastic mother. The son had abused the daughter and admitted it. Through the social services they got the chance to present the case to a committee that offered the whole family therapy, including the victim and the perpetrator. They chose that alternative and did not report it to the police. There is a specific centre working with perpetrators. The rape centre points out that if young offenders do not receive help they will continue to commit offences as adults. There are currently too few centres for perpetrators, and they do not apply for help themselves. Nowadays the centre receives both financial and political support, but it has been a long struggle to achieve this.

It has also been difficult to gain entry to the Kibbutz (small Israeli societies living as collectives and working in most cases with agriculture) - they are like families. They keep together and abuses are swept under the rug. The situation is better now, but it has taken time. Nowadays, the Kibbutz generally has a person who is responsible for dealing with occurrences within the Kibbutz. It is problematic though to work with the Kibbutz since it is a closed environment where people live very tightly together. The Centre does work with them though, and tries to gain access in order to explain how laws and regulations work.

Not working with honour-related issues

Honour-related violence does occur in certain closed groups in society. Honour killings committed by the family are common. The rape centre does not accept cases that involve honour-related violence. Instead they take such cases to the Arab centres that take care of them. Honour-related violence also occurs in other closed groups, which is something the rape centre in Nazareth knows more about. When the rape centre took such a case many years ago, it had to help a woman to flee abroad in order to save her life. Shelters do exist but even then the perpetrators are very good at finding out where the victim is. A woman who is under the threat of being murdered due to "honour" would have great difficulty remaining in the country since it is small and it is difficult to disappear.



Israeli society is strongly militarized and soldiers are a common feature of everyday life for both Israelis and Palestinians. Abuse is commonplace within the army and there is a special "hot-line" for women who have encountered such problems. Militarism is also closely connected to religion, as portrayed in this image, which shows a military parade in front of the Wailing Wall.

It takes less than a day to travel in any direction and to reach the borders.

The rape centre cooperates with many other organizations and therapists (99% are private) that specialize in victims of sexual abuse and to whom the centre can refer. There is a well-functioning centre nearby established by the government about seven years ago. Unfortunately there is a long queue and the other therapists available cannot meet the demand. When a woman needs assistance through the legal system she receives such help via a special coordinator at the centre. The rape centre has two sections, one section working preventively through education, and another working on urgent cases. The preventive section arranges courses and has outreach activities at schools and workplaces. The rape centre in Jerusalem has national responsibility for information. Recently, a far-reaching law was adopted to counter sexual harassment in the workplace. The rape centre has helped to highlight these problems.

Women against Violence

The Help Center in northern Israel is called **Women against Violence** and was established in 1994. It has an office in Nazareth but is also operating a shelter established in 2008, at a secret location somewhere in Israel. Today there are twelve people plus volunteers working at the shelter. The shelter can accept twelve women and twenty-four children at the same time. They are only working for the Arab population, both at the centre and at the shelter. This is because there are already shelters and centres for Jewish women but not for Arab women. As a result, the Help Center chose this path deliber-

ately since the founders have their origins in Arab society and understand Arab traditions better and have a better chance of helping Arab women. However, the Help Center does not reject any woman who comes looking for aid, regardless of her ethnic and religious background. But they may informed that they can receive the service at other centres. The Help Center's focus is on Arab women and the activities within this group. When a woman is stressed, emotionally upset and in crisis she expresses it best in her own language, regardless of what second language she has. As a result, knowledge of Arab culture is important. Many of the women are religious. If you do not really understand the importance of her religion or how her religion can be used to oppress her it is very difficult to understand her situation. The violence concerned does not differ from other forms of violence against women.

One example of how the religion affects the woman's situation concerns child custody. The religious laws differ from civil law in this respect. When it comes to marriage and divorce in Israel, such matters have to go through the religious courts and their laws. This means that people helping women in this respect need to have an understanding of the religious laws and what they stipulate. When it comes to sex outside marriage, tradition determines the most appropriate solution, there is nothing written in the religious laws. According to tradition, sex before marriage is not allowed. The interview participant believes that part of that tradition stems from religion. The same goes for Judaism but society there has moved on and now accepts sex before marriage. At least parts of Jewish society do so. In the Arab society this has yet to be accepted.

In 1995, a new law was introduced in Israel that included issues concerning child custody under civil law, and



In 1995, a law was passed in Israel that made it possible for custody issues to be covered by civil law, but Arab families were excluded from this. This was a concession by the Israeli leaders to satisfy Arab leaders. After six years struggle by the women's organisations, Arab women were also covered by civil law. N.B. The women in the picture have nothing to do with the text.

this was an option for those who applied through the civil courts. However, the Arab family laws were excluded from this, and the organization protested against this. Marriage and divorce are still separate from civil law. According to the interview participant, the reason for this was because the Israeli leaders wanted to please the Arab leaders, who would otherwise have protested. The women's organizations started a six-year long struggle which led to Arab women finally being included in this option. Women against Violence managed to form a large coalition of women's organizations on this issue. They encountered a great deal of resistance and were accused of trying to destroy Arab society and introducing western values into Arab society. A fatwa was issued against them and they were accused of allowing non-Muslims to decide in Muslim matters. The organization was equated with Muslims who go against their religion, and the punishment for leaving Islam is death.

This was one of the most difficult struggles they have had over the years. Finally they achieved the same law and rights for all women. Arab women are now also able to choose between civil law and religious law even in Arab society. Nonetheless, most people choose to go to the religious courts. This is due to the costs of the civil courts, but also because of the legislation itself. If divorce proceedings are started in a religious court, custody issues are automatically included. It is not possible to switch to a civil court. The aid workers in the organization always pinpoint unfair treatment or injustice in the religious courts in order to receive a fair and correct hearing of the case. The women are also offered legal counselling and a lawyer by various organizations belonging to WAV.

When the organization was established, no one wanted to talk about gender-based violence or try to counter it. The existence of this phenomenon was denied. However, after some time, the problem was recognized. Today, shelters and centres are part of social welfare policies. Everyone knows there are shelters and women going there for help, or to the police. Even relatives are now coming to the centre. For example, a father may come to visit because his daughter is

getting beaten by her husband and he wonders what he can do to help her. Another man can come and ask if his daughter has been raped and what he can do. It seems that more and more families are standing up for vulnerable women and supporting them. This would never have happened before. In the course of a recent demonstration in which more than 30 organizations participated, this support attracted attention. All political parties except "the Islamic Movement"¹⁰ participated.

Not isolated at the shelter

Many employees are trained as social workers and there is also a psychologist. This shelter was the first one for Arab women. The connection between the organization and the shelter is that the organization has the ideological foundations and the feminist insights that provide a basis for running the shelter. The organization also handles fund-raising in order to run the shelter. Some financial support is provided by the Israeli government. The shelter is one of several projects that the government is running. Since the start, they have been working hard both with the women at the shelter and in cooperation with social workers working with the husbands or men who threaten the women concerned. The women are not completely isolated at the shelter and can have contacts with the surrounding society. They still do not know what is going on at home, but usually the man is very angry because the woman has left home and other family members may also be upset, since they do not know where she is and whether she is in a respectable place.

The shelter tries to strengthen the woman and give her advice and support. At the same time, they encourage the social worker in the field to work with the family and get them to understand and to calm the situation down. In cases where there are good people in the family who are willing to support the woman, this facilitates a change; especially if a male family member is involved, such as an uncle or a

brother. The shelter first tries to find out if he has the ability to convince other members of the family. If not, they find out whether he can give her protection if she leaves the shelter or if he can help her in any other way. Sometimes he is not influential enough in the family to be able to protect her. They try to change the situation and, if the threat is removed, the woman can return home and continue to live together with the husband or file for divorce without threats and violence. In some very complicated cases, where there is no choice, the threats continue and the woman is forced to leave the country and get protection elsewhere. There are often several people in the family who are threatening the woman. The worst-case scenario is when the woman has to leave the country for protection in order not to be killed. Women against Violence has contacts abroad, which they also use.

Attitudes have to change

The shelter has statistics over the number of cases of women subjected to violence that they have been in contact with. About 80 women per year seek their help. Honour-related violence is a western expression that Women against Violence do not use. This is because there is no honour in this type of violence. They prefer to call it femicide. All women who are killed by a male relative are killed because they are women. Last year, eleven Palestinian/Arab women were killed. During the last five years, 48 women have been killed and, in all, 186 women have been killed since 1996. In the future WAV hopes that more women will be committed to fighting violence and that the number of influential males is decreasing (to the women's advantage). Attitudes in society also have to change at all levels. The centre also has a phone line taking care of counselling for women seeking help. The phone line open 24 hours a day and has been in use since 1992. Every year, they receive between 600 and 700 calls from women who are victims of violence. They use the information based on the phone line to influence politicians and get them to change the legislation. WAV also works with men in a project aimed at changing gender-based attitudes. They have a group called the partner group working with changing attitudes and stereotypes based on gender. This group is propagating its message out in the form of activities or articles addressed to, among others, men and boys in schools. It is important that men participate in the struggle against violence.

Other projects that WAV runs include courses for children, young people, teachers and parents about upbringing in schools. The courses are about upbringing and about gender-based violence, about how to protect oneself against this and what needs to be done to counteract it. The centre also trains doctors, psychologists and social workers about sexual abuse and how to handle such problems when they encounter them in their profession. It also conducts regular campaigns based on current themes. The media are very positive to the organization and there is good cooperation with them. Recently WAV had a large demonstration against violence against women and the media covered the demonstration. WAV cooperates with women's organizations in the Arab world. They are a part of a network called SELMA, with representatives from eight different Arab countries. This is a network of feminist organizations working to counter gender-based violence. There has been some resistance to such activities over the years. The worst resistance is at a structural level when people with influence express negative opinions in the newspapers or when political parties are working against them, since they are questioning the current societal norms. This is regarded as a threat to society.

The Shelter in Nablus

The initiative concerning what came to be **the shelter in Nablus**, on the northern West Bank, was taken in 1994 when a group was founded by a woman who had, among other things, spent several years in Scandinavia and had been impressed by work on women's rights in Sweden. The founder wanted to start a shelter in Palestine and therefore visited shelters in Sweden and brought the idea back to the West Bank. She opened a phone line to help women in need and in 1999 the organization opened its own shelter. They could then help women who otherwise would have been killed, committed suicide, escaped to Israel or become prostitutes. One difficulty for the shelter is that there is no legislation such as restraining orders that can prevent men posing a threat from turning up at the centre. As a result, there is an agreement with the social department that gives them a licence to run the shelter, and this gives it protection. This is a partnership with many rules that they have been jointly formulated. The shelter looks like an ordinary house and has no telltale signs that it is a shelter. The women there use pseudonyms in order to remain anonymous for as long as possible. They can slowly build up their self esteem and self confidence at the shelter so as to be able to finally, manage on their own.



The shelter in Nablus has high walls to protect vulnerable women from threats, often from their own families. They have chosen not to have guards but there is a direct alarm to the police, who can be on the spot within five minutes. There are also bars in front of the windows to prevent suicidal women jumping out.

Palestinian women are suffering from the current situation. The border was closed during the Intifada. This meant that no one could pass without a permit; students had to leave their studies. Women and children are subjected to all the dammed up aggression that the men are suffering from due to the treatment by the Israeli state. The women deal with the consequences by staying at home and are forced to manage for long periods of time without support, often in poverty. The consequences of the situation meant that the women, during the Intifada, sometimes only had an hour to get bread for the family. The men's anger was taken out on the women, who were beaten, harassed, raped and killed. The needs of women became invisible since society only saw the men. The women were killed because of the honour concept. For example, a woman could be killed for being seen with a boyfriend or if she had spent too much time outside the university without permission. She might have been pregnant or no longer be a virgin after being raped. The women who were raped did not know where to turn since they were blamed and considered criminals. Some of those who are raped, even now, run away from their family and give birth to children in secrecy

and leave them to die in deserted places, like cemeteries. This does not happen so often anymore, since social care works better now and women take medicines to abort the foetus or use other methods to achieve abortion. Previously, raped and/or beaten women, women who had lost their "virginity" and children who had been beaten, had nowhere to go, but now they have the shelter.

The shelter, when it opened, was the first of its kind in the Arab world, not only in Palestine. When it started its activities it met with fierce resistance, since this was against the rules at that time. The founder then initiated meetings with the religious leaders, who told her they had several cases of threatened women that they did not know what to do about. Some women committed suicide or sought help from their religious leader. The leaders then approved the help that the shelter provided, and they did not have to contribute anything more themselves. The shelter wanted to remain politically independent and build up its activities without the support of the political parties. However, they did have support from members of the municipal council and various other political leaders, such as the mayor, since women in need often came to them for help. They were well aware of the need for a shelter. These contact persons became aware that there was a shelter and those who were in contact with the women, like some Christian congregations, could refer them to the shelter. The organization is advertising in newspapers in order to spread information about the help-line and make people aware that the shelter exists. They also have advertisements on the radio to inform women who cannot read or write.

UNIFEM in Jerusalem

UNIFEM in Jerusalem has a pilot project for shelters in Palestine as a part of its task regarding the security of women in the area. This project was established a few years ago, but UNIFEM got involved in 2008, and it is financed by the Italian government. UNIFEM is continuing the process of establishing shelters, and is now in a phase of institutionalizing them and consolidating their capacity. UNIFEM in Palestine has developed incredibly in recent years and the office is expanding. There are about fifteen employees, with different forms of employment, consultants, administrative personnel and programme employees. The office works with projects/programmes that are related to women's human rights and gender-based violence. The shelters project links ten UN units in cooperation with the Palestinian authorities and also with organizations from the civil society involved in the Millennium goals, related to equality and the empowerment of women. This is a three-year joint programme started a year ago and it has three components: to counter gender-based violence, increase women's leadership and their political participation, and increase and strengthen women's financial independence.

The women's rights unit is also working against the trafficking of women. This is a new project. Trafficking is a very taboo subject that no one in Palestine wants to talk about and they do not have much information concerning it. The unit is cooperating with women's shelters and supporting hot-lines countering violence against women. As a result of this assignment they found that many women were subjected to violence, prostitution and trafficking. As a result, the unit decided to start investigating this phenomenon by means of case studies, which they conducted themselves. These first cases paved the way for further research that commenced in February 2010 and is being carried out within the framework of the Global Fund against HIV/Aids. The research is linked to oth-

er parts of the UN in this area and UNIFEM focuses on the transfer of HIV/Aids among the people who purchase sexual services. They are also involved in women's rights within the legal system and trying to push for a more specialized team of judges to handle cases of violence against women.

UNIFEM also has a food, security, and a legal security unit. The major part of the work that has been conducted is with the help of the Palestinian authority's Department of Women's Affairs, founded in 2004. UNIFEM is now working intensively on getting the Department to develop a strategic three-year plan to fight violence against women at the national level. For example, there are a large number of programmes focusing on developing school kitchens that run by women's organizations in rural areas. This activity gives the children healthy, nutritional food at the same time as the women in these regions get a job and become financially independent.

UNIFEM has also been working on another large project for several years - the Sobaya programme - working with decision-makers and public authorities as well as grassroots people. This programme consists of eighteen municipal centres around the West Bank where women receive basic vocational training, education in running their own business and, in the long run, becoming financially independent. The first evaluation showed a very good result and these activities can now also be found in Gaza. Some of these centres were established on a voluntary basis, but now many of them have developed into self-sustaining units.

The women's shelter in Bethlehem, the Mehwar centre, opened in 2007 and has now been operating for three and a half years. This is a pilot project. There have been other attempts to establish women's shelters in Palestine. Many of these projects are still active but they have many problems, since there is a lack of previous experience. One of the major challenges for the project in Bethlehem was first to have a broad spectrum of services available and to work on different levels, not merely focusing on violence. They worked by listening and creating plans for action and policies, so that every action would be conscious and have a clear purpose. They also work in a goal-oriented manner, so that the projects are supported by the Palestinian authorities.

European aid workers and women's organizations often have to struggle with the authorities to receive both financial and political support. In this case, the process was reversed, since the social authorities had received so many women who had been mistreated, ended up in hospitals or in psychiatric care, or were in prison. The authorities and the politicians needed help with this and that is why they encouraged the establishment of a women's shelter/centre (more detailed information about this centre subsequently).

Two types of courts

The legal system and the traditional system in the area are very fragmented and it will not be easy to change this situation. The family laws cover divorce, marriage, child custody and alimony - everything related to the family is controlled by the religious courts, whether they are Jewish, Muslim or Christian. In Jerusalem it may happen that Palestinian women come into contact with the Jewish civil legal system. They know that they would have their rights guaranteed there, but they would not be allowed to go there since the local community asks them not to trust the Jewish-Israeli system, for political reasons. On the West Bank, there are mainly Muslims and Christians, but in the Gaza strip there are only a few Christian inhabitants and it is uncertain whether the Christian family courts are used. First, there is the problem of

criminal acts being treated as civil cases by the courts. Criminal cases concern, for example, abuse and sexual exploitation and these issues are handled by the civil court. If you want to file for divorce, you go to the religious court; these two procedures are separate and not at all related. In Italy, for example, you also have this kind of separation as in Poland and England. The legal aspects of the law are the same and criminal law is also based on Sharia principles in the Islamic court. There is no real secular law to counter religious law, and everything is inspired by religion.

According to UNIFEM, it would be more effective to try to influence the system (the traditional procedures and arrangements) that can influence, support and protect women's rights. There are, of course laws, that are discriminatory, but if a judge chooses to interpret the law in a way that favours women to a larger degree he is free to do so. It is better to make the judges aware, train them and update their understanding of these problems thus enabling them to see how their role within the system can help women. The legislation is weak concerning punishment of perpetrators. The sentences are very short, especially if a perpetrator can claim that an act is honour related. Sometimes they are not convicted at all or only stay in prison for a month. Some women's organizations are also trying to influence the President. The Legislative Council does not function at all and it is only the President who can approve new laws. Some laws have been made with the Palestinian President's approval and the women's organizations are now demanding that the President to change some clauses stating that honour is an extenuating circumstance. The President and the Legislative Council have been involved in ways of changing this. Changes of this nature would help UNIFEM.

Women marry young

People are allowed to get married before the age of 18. Some women are as young as 13 or 14 years old when they are married. On the whole, people go to the courts when it is exactly the right time to get married. There are no civil marriages, only religious marriages, and men are allowed to have more than one wife. Women can get a divorce but it varies from case to case. If a woman wants a divorce because she is being beaten the shelter will help, but if she wants a divorce for other reasons this can be problematical. It is somewhat easier to get a divorce under Muslim law rather than the Christian law, since the Christian congregations hardly accept divorce under any circumstances. The Christians make it practically impossible to get a divorce, and the woman is unlikely to even try. Sometimes women convert from Christianity to Islam or from Catholic to Orthodox Christian in order to get a divorce.

The custody of children is another problem with a divorce. According to Muslim law, the children belong to the father and his family and not to the mother. If a woman leaves her husband she has no financial resources. Sometimes her family does not agree to take her back since they do not want to pay for her (as stated in the marriage contract). Sometimes they have to pay for her children and they consider that they belong to the father's family and not to their family. The woman sometimes has to choose between saving herself and getting a divorce, but losing her children, or stay in the marriage and keep the children and a violent husband. A Muslim man can marry four women, and she is just one of them. This is one of the major problems that women experience and, as a result, many women hesitate to get a divorce since they are neither protected financially or legally. When women marry,



Many women are forced to marry as early as when they are 13-15 years old. The age at which many get married has dropped according to some organizations and this is due to the economic situation as a result of the Intifada. Girls are getting married at an earlier age because their parents cannot afford to support them.

a dowry is paid and that also creates problems. Some women have more or less been sold three or four times and the father has turned it into a business. He sells his daughters and then she is forced to divorce to enable him to sell her again.

The protection available to women who are deported from other countries back to Palestine and are threatened by honour-related violence, varies. In some cases this can be handled by working intensively with positive role models within the family in order to reduce the threat. In cases where the perpetrator is not a parent or a close relative, and is willing to tackle the "honour" issue, it is possible to work with him in order to get the girl/woman back. There are many cases related to the honour concept. According to UNIFEM, most of the cases that the shelters receive are women who have been subjected to sexual abuse within the family and most of them are threatened due to the honour code. When the perpetrator is a father or brother it is hard to send the girl back to the family. There are cases in which women have continued to live in the area around Bethlehem with support from the centre and they have their own house and work. So far they have been fairly well protected and some have parents in prison, but sometimes they are too scared to report to the authorities and conduct a legal process. The perpetrators feel that they can do what they want and they are, of course, moving around freely without restrictions. The level of threat is higher in such cases.

Women who are abused sexually in early childhood rapidly develop very confused views about relationships and emotional sexual relations with other men. They are vulnerable and easy victims for continued abuse. Some women are completely unaware of what happened to them, and sometimes they accept such forced sexual relations only in the hope of someone willing to marry them and protect them in the future. Others react with a manipulative attitude in which they use their bodies to get a little power, either as victim or perpetrator. They may be regarded as highly damaged. One of the most difficult cases that the shelter in Bethlehem has had, was a woman who had been sexually exploited as a child and then been forced into prostitution. The woman ended up at the shelter, since the police forced her to stay there. She did not want to stay there, despite the level of threat towards her,

and she escaped from the shelter several times and took other girls with her. The woman continued to have contact with procurers and, at the same time, she was a guest at the shelter. The social workers understood that this woman was unable to change her perspectives of herself and her future; maybe this would never happen. Society did not accept this, but the ministers were trying to have the woman released and the police put her in prison. It is difficult to work with cases like this since the woman concerned needs to go through a process and the problems do not solve themselves. Many consider such women to be so wrecked, damaged, bad and criminal that they should not be helped, and that they have no human value. This is too difficult a challenge for the staff at the centre.

There is, of course, considerable tolerance of violence to children. This is a relatively widespread phenomenon and there are examples of school teachers who beat their pupils. This is widely accepted. When it comes to rape within marriage, women tend to consider this rather normal, and they do not react immediately. The women seeking help at the shelter have often been used by their men, but this is often only one of several types of abuse and it is usually not the reason for leaving home. It is also difficult to seek help, since the alternative is to live alone without economic and social resources. There is no section in the legislation that addresses rape within the family. Rape is traditionally considered to be something a woman is subjected to when someone loses all control and rapes her and she is supposed to come to the hospital with bruises, a broken arm or other physical problems. When someone has been raped for ten years and comes to court for this reason it is very difficult to present her as credible and demonstrate that this was something that happened to her and not something that she wanted. She risks being told that "you stayed for ten years which means you wanted this". There are many cases in which the victim is blamed. The military occupation also affects work in this area, and state-building drains the national agenda. Women's issues are universal and cannot be put aside just in order to build a nation. One cannot tell women that they will have to wait until the nation is established so that their issues can be dealt with at a later stage. Women's activists, who used to be open to an international vision and universal needs, are now closing down to a national level. UNIFEM thinks it is important to have a sharing of experiences between people who work with these issues in other parts of the world. Such cooperation should be between north and south as well as within the southern hemisphere.

The Mehwar centre¹¹

Mehwar Centre is the shelter supported by UNIFEM. It is built in accordance with high international standards and it is not only a shelter but also a centre with a wide range of services. This centre for women is financed by the Italian government and has 25 employees. The shelter accepts women from all backgrounds, ethnicities and religions, although it mainly often takes care of Arab and foreign (Russian amongst others) women, but not Israeli women. The Centre's main aim is to protect vulnerable women and it also strives to make women and families stronger. The Centre mainly helps women who are under immediate threat or who are being sexually abused within the family. Threats and violence may take the form of psychological abuse, physical abuse and/or sexual abuse.

The Centre is divided into two sections. The external section offers a variety of services including legal and social counselling to families with problems. Men, families, chil-

dren and organizations are welcome to attend meetings - not only women who have escaped from home. The idea is that the Centre should not be stigmatized and marginalized, but that it should be a centre in communication with society. It should support and protect. Legal counselling is also available for women who are seeking help in legal matters in the courts. This may involve, for example, alimony or divorce negotiations. These services are always free of charge. A part of the external location is dedicated to empowerment training, with a focus on preventive efforts to counter violence against women. The Centre provides statistics and information concerning violence, and targets young people in schools, children and teenagers, since it is very important to reach them with information about how violence towards women is manifested, how it works and how to get all parts of society to work against it. There is a garden linked to the centre, to give an impression of openness, even though the area is enclosed.

The centre also runs a day-care centre for children aged 0-3 and this is open to children from the neighbouring area. There is also have a gym offering yoga, aerobics and Thai chi classes. It is important to keep the Centre open, and demonstrate that it is an open environment in order to reduce



The Mehwar Centre is the house for women and the shelter with which UNIFEM and the social director in Bethlehem support and cooperate.

the stigma and counteract the spreading of rumours that the Centre is a place for bad women, which is a common prejudice concerning shelters for abused women. The centre has a good reputation and support, since women are able to come and go there as they please. Sometimes they have activities for the women from the shelter together with women from the neighbourhood. This is a very good way to coordinate knowledge and information between women and help get support and eliminate prejudice. Apart from the shelter, there are outreach programmes in rural areas, villages and the refugee camps, and the Centre also gives lectures about violence towards women and how to prevent it.

The internal section is the shelter, which is a large building surrounded by security measures, but it is also a "double" building. From the outside you cannot tell that this is the case, since it appears to be an office building with rooms for different activities. They have guards 24 hours a day, and an alarm system and surveillance, so the place is well guarded.



Many of the girls who run away from home and come to the Mehwar Centre are in their twenties and the most common reason for running away is that they have been sexually abused within the family. They risk being killed in the name of honour. Honour is something that has to be defended and affects everything in a woman's life, especially in the case of young women. It affects the way she dresses, for example. This picture is from Jerusalem.

When it was built, there were protests, but thanks to the far-reaching information and cooperation the Centre has managed to get neighbours and the general public to regard it in a positive light. This is also helped by the day-care and nursing facilities available to the general public. The shelter can take up to forty women with children. They accept women who are over eighteen and their children. They can take boys with their mothers, as long as the boys are under twelve. The girls can live there with their mothers regardless of age. To obtain a place at the shelter, the woman must be under some kind of threat. She is often being sexually abused by the men in her family. During the three years that the Centre has existed it has accepted 150 women. Most women at the shelter are in their twenties. They have been sexually abused and most of them have been the victims of incest in that they have been sexually abused by someone in the family.

The reason that so many of the cases involve sexual abuse is that they are living in a culture that is very closed, especially in the villages. Most cases come from these villages. Men and women are forbidden to have free sexual relations and the result is this type of relationship within the families. The family is where most of the abuse takes place, and women are the usual victims of this kind of attack. Married fathers often abuse their own daughters. Research is lacking in this area. According to the Centre, patriarchal traditions cause the man to think he owns his daughter and that he can do as he pleases with her.

The Centre's experience, in many cases, indicates that a man has had relations with his sister and/or daughter and she has become pregnant. He kills her, claiming that she had sexual relations with other men and that honour killing is the only way out. The Centre has had cases in which girls had been abused by their fathers for years, and when they went to the police to report this, they were threatened by their brothers as though it was an honour crime. They always accuse the

girl, even if she has been a victim for several years. Since it is such a small closed community it is very easy for a father, even from a family in the rural areas, to go to the minister and ask him to release his daughter. The father, who is an important man in society, talks to the minister who is more or less forced to agree. They have received letters signed by the Minister of Domestic Affairs and the Minister of Social Affairs pleading for girls to be "released" from the shelter to their fathers - the fathers who are abusing them.

Processing abuse requires years of therapy

This type of abuse requires a long period of therapy for the girl, since she has often suffered psychological damage. Sometimes this therapy may be available, but the Centre currently has no full-time psychologist. It has professional assistance from Italian NGOs but this is not sufficient. The Centre tries to help by providing self-support activities, vocational training and financial assistance. Sometimes the women want to try to continue their education at the university and receive support for doing so. But the women need more counselling and psychological help since most of them have been abused for several years. Some women also have children during their stay and they receive support in their forthcoming life. The harm done leads to a conflict between the women and their bodies. Sometimes they do not care about their bodies, and this takes them into prostitution.

It seems as if the younger ones are the ones who run away from home. They are often under 18 years old. Previously, the centre accepted girls under 18 but after a while they realized that having such young girls together with older women did not work, so the girls are sent to a shelter for younger girls located in Bethlehem. Women who are in their 40's often have children and they do not leave their family

since, by doing so, they risk losing their children. They remain under the threat of violence, since this is their culture; if they escape to a shelter they will lose contact with their children. Family law is a very old law and it does not give women their rights, particularly in the case of maintenance or divorce - men are consistently privileged. Efforts are now being made to change certain laws of sections of the legislation. This has not yet been finalized since it has been stopped on several occasions. The law regarding children is also about to change. The Centre is collecting statistics in Arabic for its cases. The report for 2008 has been compiled and is available in English and the report for 2009 is being prepared and translated. The Centre does not have a website, but this is under construction. They will have a coordinator working specifically with financing since the support from the Italian government through UNIFEM will soon expire, and the media are a key factor in securing future funding. The Centre will focus on statistics since Mehwar is the only centre that takes care of these types of cases, and it is very important to study this topic.

Trying to reintegrate women into society

According to the regulations, a woman can stay for up to one year at the shelter, but there are cases in which the woman concerned has been there for more than 3 years. These women live under a considerable threat and have nowhere to go. The Centre is working harder on such cases, trying to integrate the woman into other families that will become alternative families - foster families. The woman can work there and be protected by these families and they can live their lives there until they are strong enough to live independently and safely. In one case, they offered a woman an education; she became a medical secretary and is now working in a hospital. She has been offered a place in the home where the nurses live, and hence she is protected. This is one strategy, but the Centre considers that more help is needed and this has been discussed with the social department.

More projects are necessary in order to reintegrate these cases into society. The women need shelters since many live under great threat. They cannot remain at the Centre for more than a year since this is not allowed. The Centre continues to receive more cases, and sometimes the women can return to their families. This is not possible if the women are threatened or subjected to abuse, generally sexual abuse, by the family. The Centre tries to present alternatives and choices for the woman. The family also has to sign a binding agreement stating that they will not harm her. Much physical abuse is handled in this way by the police. They arrange written agreements with the police to guarantee that the girls will not be hurt again. The women are offered the right type of education since they are often denied this opportunity. Education gives them some freedom and space. This is the breaking point since there are so many limitations on women which are supposed to protect them. Girls cannot be allowed freedom of movement.

Criminal law is affected by the honour concept, since the section covering honour killings is very old and gives the father or husband an excuse to kill his daughter or wife in order to defend his honour. All women's institutions, the authority for women's rights and all the ministers are working to change these articles in criminal law. This is a Jordanian law from 1960 and it has been amended in Jordan but not on the West Bank where it is still applied. On the Gaza Strip, an old

Egyptian law is used and the interview participant thinks this law dates from the 1930's. This law completely violates women's rights and gives an excuse for a man to kill his wife or daughter when he considers it an honour killing or wants to defend his honour. Most cases are not honour-related crimes, but it is used as an excuse to avoid conviction.

The roots of this honour concept come from French law and former colonization. All institutions are working to remove Article 340 in the criminal code, which gives the perpetrator an excuse to kill and attribute the crime to honour. Instead, the law should treat all murders as murders. If a girl is sexually abused by a family member who senses that his crime will be revealed, he will kill her and say that she did something wrong. According to the culture, virginity is considered to be a very important issue and girls often have problems because they are no longer virgins. If a girl is not a virgin on her wedding day they will kill her. She may also be killed even if she is a virgin but does not bleed on the wedding night. There are many cultural aspects that affect these honour-related crimes and this is a very serious and difficult issue.

According to the interview participant, people constantly refer to religious matters and religious texts such as the Koran or the Bible. The Centre has religious members that support women's rights. When the public hears an Imam or a Christian priest condemning violence against women, this may make people reflect more on these issues. This affects people more than if someone else said the same thing. Much work is being done through religious leaders, but there have also been religious perpetrators. A religious man is treated like any other perpetrator. They are mostly trying to use people who support women's rights, people with power. Sometimes, when talking to people who are not so well educated, it is good to cite the religious scriptures and the religious laws in favour of women. Many women are believers. Most women who are in the circle of violence say that "he has the right to beat me". As a result, the organization is working to raise awareness amongst women. The woman accuses herself and considers the man has the right to hit her since God grants him that right, or that society gives him that right. This is, however, a matter of interpretation of the religious texts.

The right target group

There is also WCLAC, a women's organization that works with legal aid and counselling and has an emergency shelter. The social department has now signed an agreement with WCLAC in order to send all emergency cases to this shelter. They then compile the initial information that they receive from the woman to see if this is a case for Mehwar and, if so, she will be sent there. They are trying to sort the cases so that they do not end up with cases that they cannot handle or cases that are not part of the Mehwar target group. This is very important and the department is working on opening a new centre in the north. Mehwar is overloaded and it cannot continue to maintain high quality when it is overloaded.

Mehwar also cooperates with various NGOs in networks and with other departments that can help with other issues concerning vulnerable people. There is no research linked to the centre. They wish there could be a centre just as big in the north. Then the cases in the north could go south (Mehwar) and the southern cases could go up north for security reasons. This would also be good for emergency cases. Shelters that do not offer the same kind of services as Mehwar are required and there is also a need for shelters to help each

other with various tasks. Then the women who really are in need of help can be treated at the hospital psychiatric wards and then come to Mehwar for continues work on their cases. These are serious cases of post-traumatic stress disorder. The interview participant is hopeful about the future, and thinks that they are achieving really important goals in Palestine and working hard to achieve more. They also have very good people, such as the social director in Bethlehem, who have dreams and work hard to realize them. They are currently working hard to institutionalize everything and to construct a bureaucracy in order to create an institution with laws and regulations for everyone. This is very important in order to stabilize for their activities, and not to be dependent on which government is in power at the time. They also have to work hard with women's institutions, and the ministry for women's rights also has an important role to play in this area.

The Social Director in Bethlehem

The Social Director in Bethlehem is responsible for all social authorities in the region, which means meeting the needs of all categories of people. There are about 53 employees in the social office, and there are three special departments, one for children under the age of 18, a school for the blind and a shelter for women.



The military occupation affects many Palestinians on an everyday basis. For example, they have to queue for several hours and pass numerous checkpoints in order to get to work.

The shelter (Mehwar) is under government supervision, since it also receives women from other regions and is directly subordinate to the social minister. The shelter has a contract with the Ministry of Social Affairs but is still an NGO-run project supported by UNIFEM. However the idea is that when the financing from UNIFEM expires, the shelter should be taken over completely by the Ministry of Social Affairs and managed by the state. This is the first shelter of its kind, not only in Palestine, but in the whole of the Middle East. It receives many visitors from Europe and the people visiting say that they have nothing similar. Most shelters in the Middle East and in Europe are operating in secret, but the idea of the women's shelter is that it should instead be open in order to protect women from violence, and it is not secretive about the women under its protection.

In order to come to terms with the violence towards women and honour-related violence, large-scale educational programmes are necessary at all levels. Cooperation is needed inside and outside the shelters, in the meetings between men and women - both formal and informal - and in meetings with independent people to spread knowledge and to change attitudes. New educational programmes are being run and have already reached many people. A workshop was recently been conducted with Palestinian lawyers and lawyers invited

from Italy to exchange experiences. This workshop led to some really good recommendations with guidelines for decision-makers regarding questions of violence towards women and honour-related violence.

There is still a great deal to be done - work on how men think, how men use the law against women and so on. The work must continue with decision-makers, lawyers and social workers in Palestine. There is also a great deal of violence within the police force, and policemen's own families are the victims. More specialized social workers are needed, and also more psychologists. The way they are working is to focus on finding solutions. They are not only working with violence towards women and honour-related violence, but on many other social problems that need to be solved. One problem is that they do not have a social worker who specializes in working with women and children who have been victims of violence. There was such a person previously, but now it is difficult to allocate these cases to the right person. In addition, there are not enough people in the local offices in Ramallah or Nablus. The area of responsibility is too large and the number of employees too small. Currently their activities are not prioritized. The turnover of staff is very high and calls for further education for employees in the field. They still have problems and a weakness in collecting statistics on different types of cases. They have a large area to cover - the entire West Bank.

The legislation in the area is Sharia - the family laws for the Arab women. Lately the authorities have tried to coordinate them with civil law. On the Gaza strip, there is another kind of law, an Egyptian law for all Palestinians there. On the West Bank, there is ordinary civil criminal law as well as Sharia laws. NGOs are working to change this, but the political problems in Palestine and problems between Hamas and the authorities in Bethlehem, makes the progress slow, no changes within the legislation are allowed at present. When the political problems have been solved, the proposed legislative changes are there to be dealt with and put into practice. For example, with regard to the Child Protection Law, there are only a few sections remaining, but they have to be approved by the President of Palestine first. It has been really difficult to establish the ministry as close as in Ramallah. In Gaza, all the previous employees of the ministry are at home, and have been replaced by Hamas or Hamas sympathizers. This is a very difficult situation that also results in the Ministry for Social Affairs in Bethlehem not having any contact with Gaza because it has no contacts there. A Palestinian researcher at the American university in Beirut wanted to do a study in Gaza, and it was very difficult and dangerous to even establish a contact in the area.

The social director does not have much hope for the future, since the political situation has forced the process to start from square one on numerous occasions. Families who could previously manage are now living in severe poverty; the development of society affects everything. A new social safety net is needed and a programme is starting for people who have recently become poor. It will cost millions. The social workers need to fill in a questionnaire for every family applying for help, and the applications are approved by the ministry. The first year will be the most difficult - the poorest families will get help first and the others will be offered other kinds of assistance. Once Palestine is no longer under occupation and is at peace, many things will solve themselves. The present political situation is very difficult and they are under a state of siege. As long as new settlements are allowed, there is no solution in sight. Ten years ago things looked better, but since then there has been a second Intifada, which has made the situation worse.

3.3 Follow-up

Isha L'Isha in Haifa is not only working in a preventive way. It also has a project working with female victims of trafficking in Israel. This mainly involves efforts to protect and help the women, but also intense lobbying of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) to improve the legislation and to inform people about the current situation.

This work started in 2002, but before that another organization (not in Haifa) was responsible. The problem of trafficking in Israel escalated after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, when many eastern Europeans came to Israel, but also criminal gangs forcing women into prostitution. Women's activists discovered that a house in Tel Aviv was being used as a brothel in 1997, with victims of trafficking as prostitutes. Many newly arrived women were poor, there was a market that was already established and the men in Israel exploited this situation. Gradually, the organization has been able to reach the women, but they have to be able to support themselves financially in some other way. Initially, many ended up in prison and the legislation is still incomplete and is now being revised. The social workers realized that they need to be able to offer sustainable alternatives - purely social activities. As a result, the trafficking group had to put pressure on parliament to gain support for their work. The United States also put pressure on the government in the form of a specific report that acknowledged the problem and the dangers.

After pressure from Isha L'Isha and other women's organizations, the President of Israel acted in December 2003. He spoke about the difficult situation for women who are subjected to trafficking. The President and the ministers responsible declared that a real effort was needed to come to terms with organized crime in Israel. Finally (in 2007), the decision-makers also noted the local type of prostitution that had been going on all the time, and not just newly immigrated women or women who had been forced to immigrate.

There is a clinic that accepts people infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. There is also a mobile clinic working with outreach activities and helping vulnerable people within the sex industry in the areas of concern. It also works directly with information and education, apart from pure health care and treatment. There is various information concerning how many prostitutes are active in Israel. The trafficking coordinator and the government's spokespersons disagree in this matter.

Many of the problems could be solved by means of greater support from the immigration authorities, so that women can receive correct documents and a legal status in the country if they choose to stay. They would then also get the legal aid to which they are entitled. They also need a functioning social insurance that gives the women and their children economic aid, so they can support themselves until they have found a job or been educated. It is also necessary for the former eastern bloc to start to address questions regarding women and women's rights. Merely talking about the existing problems will not solve anything; it is necessary to talk about human rights. They are looking for international cooperation on human rights. The cases and the dangerous people they are dealing with make things very difficult.

When men's crimes against women are really regarded as crimes and they are prosecuted, there will be a gradual

changes in society as a whole. In Israel, the politicians have been trying, and have partly succeeded, to make some changes in the right direction for vulnerable women, but this is mainly due to the pressure of the women's organizations and efforts by women. There is, however, much left to be done.

The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling in Ramallah

WCLAC (the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling) in Ramallah is an organization working with legal counselling. For the most part it handles women who are the victims of violence. Originally, this was a relatively small office with a few employees, but today it has developed into a relatively large organization. There are currently about forty employees at WCLAC and there are also five groups of volunteers in different parts of Israel, each group consisting of 20 to 25 people. The volunteers are often recently qualified lawyers and social workers. They help three shelters with their support. In their own shelter they can receive about twelve women and their children - that is more than twenty people in total - at the same time. WCLAC was established twenty years ago in connection with the first Intifada, when it was discovered that there was a need for aid targeted at women who were particularly vulnerable in terms of marriage, divorce and specific female problems. When the first Intifada took place, the Israeli military were very brutal towards the Palestinian population. Many young men, some as young as 15 to 16 years old, were imprisoned if they as much as uttered a word against the occupation.



Most women who seek help at WCLAC are threatened by honour-related violence. The fact that the woman has dared to run away from home may mean she is risking her life. The picture is from Ramallah.

When the men disappeared, the women were forced to take over and a committee of grassroots activists was established. As soon as meetings for women were to be arranged they had to take place completely in the open. It was also a dangerous task that could be used by the Israeli Mossad¹². Women were its targets and they and their families suffered various forms of oppression. As a result, the activist activities were completely underground during the years 1988-1990. Both lawyers and social workers participated and worked completely anonymously and free of charge. Just as there are "Foot doctors" in China they were "Foot lawyers" here. The shelters were established already before the Palestinian authority was assembled. They gave women protection by placing them in reliable private homes, in boarding schools, convents and whatever they could find. Some were killed without anyone being able to help them and also those who helped the women were living dangerously, since no one was able to protect them. In Palestinian society at this time, sex (and prostitution) was linked to drugs and collaboration with the Israeli state.

Women's rights activists were attacked

At this time there was no one to protect the aid workers. They were attacked both by the families and by the Israeli intelligence service which wanted information. A Palestinian girl, who escaped to Sweden, was introduced to Mossad's officials by an employee at the Swedish Migration Board. Mossad wanted to recruit her as a spy on other Palestinians living in Sweden. When she refused she was threatened by Mossad. She was advised by WCLAC to contact with a Swedish lawyer and make this public. The official who was handling her case in Sweden and her social worker were furious when they heard about what had happened.

The shelters have been welcomed in the Palestinian territories. The police, in particular, were very enthusiastic, while the social welfare authorities were reluctant to begin with since they did not prioritize these women. They had a great many social problems to deal with, such as orphanages and widows, but now there is a state-owned shelter for women. There are cases of different types of violence within families, including violence committed by brothers or fathers. Sometimes there is also sexual harassment which might lead to sexual abuse or unsanctioned sexual relations outside the family, which then tries to kill the women. In most cases this is a question of honour-related violence. When a girl/woman seeks help for the first time, this is often when she runs away from home to the police station, the neighbours or to some hotel. Just doing that can put her life at risk and therefore the shelter means direct protection of her life. In the shelter, the woman meets professionals such as social workers who go through her story, investigate her situation and make a thorough risk-analysis. They discuss what they can do for her, and what steps they must take if they are to talk to her family, the police and so on. In some cases the woman needs a lawyer.

The work with families is achieved by cooperating with the social department and also with independent, competent NGOs. In family sessions with social workers present, all the participants can present their view of the problem and come up with different solutions. Sometimes this is successful and sometimes not. When it fails, this is due to the family's reluctance and inability to understand and its desire to solve the problem in a good way. The family then tries to get help from higher authorities (members of parliament for example) and the police. Using other stronger forms of pressure, WCLAC is trying to get the family to sign an agreement not

to harm or bother the girl when she leaves the shelter. Not all family members are willing to sign the agreement or stand by it, and sometimes the girl still gets into trouble. Girls have been killed, but not when WCLAC has been involved. This has, however, happened to other organizations working with the same kind of agreement.

WCLAC has never been in trouble and they think this is because they work at different levels - everything from working directly with the girl or the family to a legal case and changing attitudes. All these levels are necessary. WCLAC tends to work with the male family members, trying to increase their awareness and change their attitudes. If WCLAC is in any doubt concerning the safety of the girl if she returns to the family, the family will not be reunited. WCLAC has international contacts with Sweden, Palestinian organizations and with Jordan. They cooperate with organizations in Stockholm and Malmö in Sweden that are part of Roks, SKR and the sisters of Somaya. They also cooperate with other organizations in Israel if the woman is an Israeli citizen, and with the US embassy if the woman is an American citizen, or with the Australian embassy. There is no known incident of a girl having to leave the country because of the level of threat. On the other hand, they are working actively to reunite the victim with the family, without risk.

WCLAC recently signed an agreement to cooperate with the social department, which means that all cases are to be referred to them. The department has noticed WCLAC's successful work, and the agreement has entailed considerable goodwill. It means that all cases that need to go to a shelter will go through WCLAC's shelter, and then WCLAC will investigate together with another organization how to proceed. When it comes to research and statistics, these are conducted within the organization. The statistics are used within the organization and include counselling. This also enables the shelter to analyse and improve its work. It then reports to the authorities and decision-makers concerning possible legislative changes, but WCLAC has no links with any university research at the moment.

Working vis-a-vis the religious courts

WCLAC mainly deals with the religious courts, especially with the Muslim court, but also with the Christian court. Cases of physical abuse, murder and attempted murder go to the civilian court, since these are treated as criminal cases. The exception is an honour killing since this is still covered by Jordanian law¹³ from the 1960's and is being handled on a specific basis. Other matters such as marriage, divorce and custody are considered to be covered by family laws and are handled by the religious court. In cases of violence within the family, nothing can be done in court unless the woman is under eighteen, (a minor), and is abused or is a victim of sexual abuse by someone in the family, for example the father. The perpetrator can then be prosecuted if another male family member reports him for such abuse but the daughter cannot do this herself since the man (or male relatives) is her custodian. However, the daughter can seek help directly at a shelter, if she thinks that several male relatives are threatening her and that she cannot be protected if she continues to live with her family. WCLAC, the police and the court will then help her. When she is 18, she can personally report the father, or any other person threatening her, but it is still viewed as very difficult for the girl to go through the legal process since she will have no support from society. It is considered a family matter and, if anything happens to her, the family will blame it on her having a relationship outside the family with-



According to Islamic law, divorce is the concern of the man and not the woman. There are few exceptions in Sharia law that entitle a woman to a divorce, although a man can demand divorce and have it granted immediately.

out their permission. Most women do not dare to seek help, but they can get support in other ways, for example through empowerment, so they can change their situation after a while. Sometimes there are other kinds of criminality within the family (the brother or the father might have committed other criminal acts) that enables them to be prosecuted and sentenced to prison. Cooperation between police, the judge, government and NGOs functions very well and this makes the task easier.

Abortion is forbidden in the Palestinian territories and if a doctor is found to have performed an abortion he will be sentenced to prison. It is only in cases of incest that the woman/girl can have a private abortion in Jerusalem, since this is considered a social problem and she will receive help from the social department in Jerusalem. In Muslim society, virginity is of the utmost importance, for both the man and the woman, and "virginity controls" are quite frequent. If the girl is worried about damage to her hymen, she will have a check-up, and also if she is worried before the wedding. She will then receive a certificate saying that she is a virgin. Sometimes the girl has had sexual intercourse and wants to be sewn up before the wedding. In such cases, WCLAC will arrange contact with other doctors and other organizations. Many girls are murdered due to rumours that they have lost their virginity before their wedding. This is a major problem.

When it comes to divorce, Islamic law is the ruling law, and therefore divorce is the man's business and not the woman's. There are few exceptions in Sharia law that grants women a divorce, but then she has to go on trial. Such cases

might involve repeated physical abuse and rape, for example. This may take years. The man, on the other hand, is entitled to demand a divorce and have it granted immediately. Sharia law also rules on child custody. When the boy or girl reaches a fertile age, the boy can decide if he wants to stay with his mother or his father. The girl has no choice: the father has custody over her. If a married woman is left in the country without her husband (if he escapes for example) she will have to move back home again, or to her parents-in-law, according to tradition. The woman is not allowed to leave the country with the children without her husband's or another male relative's approval. A woman with children usually lives with her family if her husband is absent for some reason. This enable her to get help from her family and, at the same time, this proves that she did not have another sexual relationship while her husband was away. Economic policies also have considerable influence on how prevalent violence against women is, and this is often a determining factor. Education is also a very important factor for change, as well as legislative changes. This is an international problem and does not only affect Palestinians.

WCLAC receives financial support from the government and from NGOs, but this is not enough. WCLAC wants to be acknowledged by various institutions and authorities in the future. It also wants to develop international cooperation with other organizations working with issues concerning women's rights in order to learn from each other and exchange experiences.

4. HBTQ in Israel/ Palestine

Homosexuality is a topic that is still a problem and is taboo in Israel/Palestine. According to *Isha L'Isha*, there are HBTQ (Homosexual, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer) persons, mainly young boys, who meet on a regular basis in Haifa and Tel Aviv and have parties and youth cafés together. During such an activity in 2009, a person walked in and shot several young boys. The attack killed a counsellor and a fourteen year old girl as well as injuring several young boys. One of them is in a wheelchair today. The problem was that many of them were not yet open with their sexual preference and it was painful both for themselves and their families to have matters revealed in this way. The attacker has still not been found or arrested, and the critics claim that the police are not really trying to find him. Since this happened in Tel Aviv, people said that this was "a nest for HBTQ people", which prompted *Isha L'Isha* to stage a support demonstration in Haifa in order to show that HBTQ persons are everywhere in society, that every person has the right to a dignified life, and that homophobia is everywhere and has to be counteracted. People participating in the demonstration got stones thrown at them by passers-by and *Isha L'Isha* reported this to the police. The police claimed though that since there was no injury, this was neither harassment nor assault.

Homophobia is widespread in Israel; on the surface it looks like a modern country but actually this is not the case. The homosexuals who are accepted in society are rich white men. When *Isha L'Isha* was at a school recently, talking about homosexuality and HBTQ people, a girl spoke to them afterwards and said "even if I were a lesbian, which I am not (which she probably was, according to the interview participant), I would never walk hand in hand with another girl/woman on the street and I would never talk to my father about it. Then I would rather live alone". She did not see the possibility of being happy with another woman. On another occasion, a

teacher, who was a lesbian, asked *Isha L'Isha* not to talk about it in the classes. Today, homosexuals, both lesbians and gays, live together but they cannot get married. They cannot have children by means of an artificial method such as egg donation.

According to *Kayan* you can live openly as a homosexual. Of course you are discriminated against, as everywhere else, but it is socially accepted. Homosexuals cannot get married though. Marriages are only registered by the religious denominations. It is possible, however, to marry abroad and then register as married when returning to Israel. The Supreme Court has ruled on this.

According to *UNIFEM* there is such a denial of HBTQ that it is hard to know whether people are prepared to kill in the name of honour and thereby admit that their daughter is, for example, a lesbian. The denial of the existence of homosexuality is greater. There have been a couple of cases at the shelter in Bethlehem where women/girls had lesbian tendencies or identities. But, according to the interview participant, it is hard to say if this was a result of the abuse they experienced or if it really was their identity. The family is living in complete denial. The woman does not consider that she is homosexual; she doesn't ignore it and she doesn't want to see it.

According to *Mehwar*, the shelter that UNIFEM cooperates with, they have received several homosexual women who have been abused. The centre has strict policies about not having sexual relations at the shelter, and does not consider this difficult to handle. They have had women acting as lesbians and sensed that this was their sexual identity, but they have not received any threats regarding honour-related issues due to this. Homosexuality is something that is not accepted in society and even if a woman feels that this is her identity she will not say anything since it is completely forbidden in this society.



Israeli society is more sex-segregated than one might think at first glance - here is an example from Tel Aviv where a special beach has separate schedules for men and women. On some buses in Jerusalem women are expected to sit in the back and men in the front.

5. Summary

This was the first time that we, Maria Hagberg and Karin Jonegård, visited Israel/Palestine and what struck us was that it is such a militarized area. We saw significantly more armed men and more weapons in circulation than we had done in northern Iraq where we had just been. The security checks were widespread - at bus stops, restaurants, and grocery stores. At one time we had to add a guard fee to the bill when we were in a restaurant. The organizations we met were very generous in sharing their experiences and we learned a great deal. We learned that the religions in the area have a large impact when it comes to marriage, divorce and child custody, especially on a woman's life. The religions seem almost directly counterproductive to women's rights and increase the risks for women's safety. There are three religious courts that handle every family matter from birth, child custody, marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. Apart from the religious courts there is a civil court dealing with civil matters - mostly criminal law, administration and business matters - but the civil court can also handle family issues. This court is too costly for poor women, however, which forces many women to use the religious courts. Here, the organizations make a huge humanitarian and social contribution, as is evident in our report.

Violence against women, prostitution, sexual abuse and sex trafficking are huge problems in this society. In ad-

dition, there is homophobia and honour-related violence, which is widespread. In the Arab legislation in the Palestinian dominated areas, murder committed in the name of honour is still seen as an extenuating circumstance. The interview participants do not consider religion to be the cause of this type of thinking, but rather tradition. However, at the same time, the legislation is considered to be religious and this seems to be a contradiction. Conservative/orthodox Jews have rules in their family laws, which seriously affect the situation of women. For example, the husband may refuse his wife a divorce for her entire life, while he can re-marry in a form of polygamy. When it comes to military service, boys can choose to do it or avoid it by studying Judaism to become a rabbi. Young women can marry and have children in order to avoid military service.

What shocked us was the considerable market in human eggs in which young students sell their eggs in a business that is still illegal. They are carefully interviewed regarding their "correct Jewish genes", transferred abroad where the procedure takes place and they get well paid. Christian Catholics in the area are converting to the Greek Orthodox religion in order to be able to divorce.

The trafficking situation is strong and growing, not the least the sex-slave trade where criminal gangs who

have emigrated from the former Eastern bloc are holding young women as slaves. Women who are social outcasts or threatened by honour-related violence are easy targets in the growing sex-slave trade; they have nothing to return to except death. They are threatened both by their families and by society. In addition, women from Africa are being used and NGOs have discovered that they have increased infertility due to disreputable doctors who have been administering birth control injections to keep down the birth rate among the guest workers. Racism in society is flourishing.

Military occupation is a problem

The employment situation is difficult for the Palestinians and they are having a hard time in everyday life. Many are denied work because they are Palestinians and a form of apartheid against Palestinians in society is prevalent. Communications with Gaza are virtually non-existent, and Hamas is making cooperation even more difficult within the Palestinian dominated territories due to internal political differences, bureaucracy and patriarchal power structures. This is a problem that particularly affects the women's organizations. Women's rights have once again slid down the agenda. The Israeli state-apparatus is authoritative and discriminatory. The construction of walls and checkpoints prevents women from participating in society even more, and applies especially to Palestinian women. For example, some Palestinian families keep their daughters at home, thus preventing them from completing their education, as a result of potential harassment at the checkpoints. A woman who had just delivered a child was forced to wait for hours to pass; another one was forced to pass illegally in order to take her mother to the hospital. The Israeli authorities have to give their approval for someone to pass and they are delay the process which often makes studying and work extremely difficult, especially for women. The situation is even more of a problem for women due to the conservative religious laws that affect the whole region, regardless of religious affiliation.

There is a huge difference in the social structure between the Israeli and the Palestinian areas. The class differences are obvious. The Israeli areas are often modern and

well functioning while the Palestinian areas are poor and in decline. Women, regardless of their background, are working together against the injustice and there was considerable awareness of this in both the Palestinian and the Israeli-dominated areas. This gives a glimmer of hope for the future. Women exposed to violence have sometimes difficulty in getting sufficient protection within the country, since it is geographically small and spreading rumours is quite easy, especially in the case of honour-related violence. It is mainly people threatened by honour killings who are forced to leave the country (if possible) or stay for years in the shelters. Several murders are committed every year.

HBTQ people have a better situation in the Israeli areas due to a more liberal viewpoint, but in the Palestinian areas HBTQ is a topic that cannot even be discussed. "It is a non-issue" as several interview participants told us. "You simply don't talk about it; it is taboo". Serious hate crimes against HBTQ people have been reported; recently there was a murderous attack at a youth club in Tel Aviv. Ethnic and religious animosity has increased in the region. An increase in racism is becoming apparent since the Arab and Jewish blood heritage is being emphasised by certain groups. Check-points are likely to increase honour oppression in the Palestinian regions, child marriages have increased due to poverty but it may also happen that a father forces his daughter to divorce several times in order to marry her off several times for financial benefit. Women are treated as merchandise. There is still a lack of statistics and also evaluations and research on the topic of gender-based violence. More organizations, particularly the Palestinian organizations want to have more support, funding and cooperation with countries in the European Union. Today, such cooperation is very limited. Finally, we would like once again to point out that the people working for women's rights and against violence and honour-related violence are very brave and worthy of encouragement and support. Since several of them have requested this report we will translate it into English and eventually, we hope, also into Hebrew and Arabic. We have carried out a great deal of voluntary work and we hope this will benefit both professionals and volunteers who are working with the questions that we focus on in the report.

6. Thanks

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to a very informative and exciting trip to Israel/Palestine in February 2010. Our hope is that the knowledge we have gathered may be of great help to individuals and organizations in Sweden, who are involved with these issues. We want to thank the Women for Peace organization and especially Bibbi Steinertz, our organization secretary, who encouraged us in our project application and realization of the trip. We would also like to thank Mideto Feza Kalala and Maria Sundbom Ressaissi, at the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, for their help in connection with our applications. We want to thank the Network against Honour-Related Violence which, as a result of years of work has established the network of contacts that we have benefited from.

In addition to all friendly organizations and friends, we would also particularly like to thank the following people who have helped us with various contacts; Diana Mubarak - social director, Fadia at the Swedish General Consulate, Boriana Jönsson at Woman to Woman and Liz at the Rape Center in Haifa, as well as Anne Casparsson. We want to thank three women, also friends, who we met during the trip and who have given us wise reflections on the difficult situation; Bhutina Khoury - film-maker Tavbeh, Ramallah, Fatmeh Kassem - author and researcher at the Ben Gurion University in Beersheba, and Frances Raday - sociologist and researcher in Jerusalem. We would also like to thank Yvonne Fredriksson of the Palestine Solidarity Association of Sweden (PGS) who arranged a meeting with us at very short notice and gave us with vital information regarding the situation in the country.

Thanks also to our families and friends who support and inspire us.

Last but not least, all the brave women, and some men, who have participated as informants and shared their knowledge. This has taught us a lot, which we now hope to convey to others.

Maria Hagberg and Karin Jonegård, 2 February 2011

Organizations interviewed

Nablus: Shelter

Ramallah: AWCSW, WCLAC

Nazareth: Women against Violence (Help centre in northern Israel)

Haifa: Kayan, Rape centre, Isha L'Isha

Bethlehem: Social director Bethlehem, Mehwar Centre

Jerusalem: UNIFEM Palestine, NGO responsible at the Swedish General Consulate in Jerusalem

Beersheba: Help Centre in Beersheba

Interview guide Shelters/Other organizations

How long has the shelter existed?

How many people work here: employees, volunteers? educational background?

How many places do you have? What do you do if there is a queue to the shelter?

What was the reason you started?

Who took the initiative for starting?

Are there other shelters in the country? Who administers them?

Have any decision-makers given support to the shelter? Have you met any difficulties/resistance in conducting your work? From whom?

Have you received positive responses? From whom?

Do you compile statistics on women exposed to violence? HBTQ people exposed to violence? Children exposed to violence?

Do you compile any statistics on honour-related violence? What do you see as the cause of honour-related violence? How is the prevalence of honour-related violence in comparison to other violence?

Are the perpetrators prosecuted? What is the relevant legislation? Age of consent? Sex outside marriage? Right to abortion? Right to homosexual relations? Divorce?

Child custody? In the event of death? Age for marriage? Cohabitation without marriage? Violence within marriage? Rape within marriage? Dowry? Corporal punishment?

Who are your partners in civil society, NGOs and other authorities? Internationally?

How do you fund your organization? Is it enough? What other resources do you need?

How are you working to solve the situation of women under threat? Do you work with other groups and if so, how?

What do you think is necessary to come to terms with men's violence against women and honour-related violence in terms of preventive work, emergencies and follow-up?

Do you have research connected with the work of your organizations? Is it needed? What do you want it to study?

What do you think about the future and the development of your organization?

Further reading

You can contact Woman for Peace to receive the original interviews, both as transcripts and the entire re-worked interviews, since this report is a summary.

- "Murder in the Name of Honour" by Rana Husseini, 2009

Links

www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se

www.kvinnorforfred.se

www.minheder.nu

<http://www.isha.org.il/eng/>

<http://www.unwomen.org/>

<http://www.wclac.org/english/index.php>

<http://www.awcsw.org/>

<http://www.kayan.org.il/en/>

<http://hrcc.1202.org.il/English/template/default.asp?siteId=4> (Rape Centre in Haifa)

<http://www.wavo.org/?LanguageId=1>

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Footnotes

¹ This is a summary of Palestinian self governance from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs Country Guide 902 Israel, 2007 p. 20-37, 50-56 and updates from the Institute's web database <http://www.landguiden.se.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/> 2010-01-05

² UN, the United Nations, international peace- and security organisation with headquarter in New York, USA. The UN was established at the end of World War Two when it replaced The League of Nations. The purpose of the UN is to keep peace and security, promote international cooperation and economic and social development and work for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its regulations were approved on 24 October 1945 (Swedish language encyclopedia)

³ Mizrahim is the common term for all oriental Jews from North Africa, Turkey and Western Asia. Swedish Institute of International Affairs Country Guide 902 Israel, 2007 p. 6

⁴ An egg cell can also be called ovum in Latin.

⁵ Director Zippi Brand Frank. Documentary: Googlebaby: A journey across three continents telling the story of the up and coming baby production industry in the age of globalization. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1490675/>

⁶ Knesset is the Israeli Parliament with 120 members, chosen for a mandate period of four years. The Knesset passes laws, monitors the government and may take a vote of confidence targeting the government or the president
Swedish Institute of International Affairs Country Guide 902 Israel from 2007 p. 11-12

⁷ See Isha L'Isha's website for more info <http://www.isha.org.il/eng/>

⁸ Empowerment (English) A principal that is being used in feminist therapy and education to strengthen the individual's opportunities for becoming more independent, being able to formulate their own goals and take power over their lives (Nationalencyklopedin Swedish language encyclopedia)

⁹ The Palestine solidarity association of Sweden PGS

¹⁰ <http://www.islamicmovement.org/>

¹¹ This section is mainly based on the interview at the Peshawar centre but also on interviews with UNIFORM and the social director in Bethlehem, since they also involved in these activities

¹² Mossad is the Israeli intelligence agency

¹³ Article 340 of the Jordanian legislation exempts honour killings and sees them as a mitigating circumstance that leads to a milder sentence if you are convicted. This article has now been repealed in Jordanian legislation (see Murder in the Name of Honour, Rana Husseini 2009), but not in the Palestinian territories, for example the West Bank

Women for peace (*Kvinnor för Fred*)
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Risk and Security for Women in Israel/Palestine

Woman for Peace is an association that is not affiliated with any political party or religious organization. It works for peace on women's terms. We have been working on different projects in Palestine over the years and we also support and participate in "Women in Black" – manifestations, working for peace in the Israel - Palestine conflict. In our cooperation with organizations in various regions in the Middle East we have become aware of the knowledge gaps in Sweden regarding the violence there, especially in the form of honour-related violence. This has led us to choose to write a report regarding the women's security situation in the region. We have interviewed a number of voluntary organizations and authorities who are working with everything from courses and education to women's shelters. Our report covers the situation of violence from a preventive perspective, an emergency perspective and a follow-up perspective. The report touches on the problems that the various organizations encounter in their work, which mainly involves the way in which women, HBTQ people and children, are affected by a society in which honour issues are so prevalent. The purpose of the report is to have a simple structure, so that both authorities and organizations in Sweden and Israel/Palestine can use it, but also so that the organizations interviewed can make use of the report in practice.

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Women for Peace