



Report on Refugee and Stateless Women across the Arab Region

Stories of:

The Dream of Return, the Fear of Trafficking and Discriminatory Laws

Coordinated by

The Karama Movement in the Arab Region

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Introduction

A number of international conventions provide for the protection of refugees' rights. These include: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol of 1967, the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls for international protection for refugee women and their children. The need to address the dire situation of female refugees in Arab states is prompted by the aggravated suffering which they endure, and which calls for the evocation of three fundamental rights derived from the principles of international humanitarian law: the right of refugees to return to their original homeland, the right to be compensated for their material losses and psychological trauma, and the right to have their property restored.

The right of refugees to return to their places of origin is closely linked with peoples' right to self-determination, a right considered by international law as a fundamental rule. The issue of refugee men and women is, furthermore, linked to the unity of their lands and their people.

The suffering of refugee women is compounded by the daily violation of their human rights as a result of continued occupation (e.g., in the case of Palestinian women) and ongoing conflict (e.g., in the case of Iraqi and Sudanese women). Another factor compounding their suffering is the lack of a permanent solution after many years of displacement, which contravenes the right of female refugees to return to their homes. Other factors include the imposition of collective punishment polices, which lead to depriving women and their children from their basic needs such as food and medicines; the deteriorating situations inside camps, where refugees are deprived from the minimum requirements for a decent life; the bad sanitary and health conditions as a result of the low health services provided to refugees, not to mention to low or non-existent educational services. This is mainly due to the fact that the Relief Agency for refugees is under-resourced, a fact which leads to depriving female refugees from the primary health care services, in addition to the maternal and child

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care. The deterioration of the economic situation of refugees is another factor contributing to compounding the suffering of refugees and female refugees in particular. Female refugees fleeing from their countries as a result of wars and crises are sometimes vulnerable to human trafficking or to sign work contracts which deprives them of their simplest basic rights such as the right of mobility (moving from one place to another).

Refugee and displaced women are usually subjected to various forms of violence and discrimination. These include:

1. Denying them the right to have access to the services of the Relief Agency for Employing Refugees.
2. Discriminating against them with regards to their legal rights and depriving them of their right to political representation.
3. Forcing them to coercively return to their original homelands.
4. Failure to provide them with security against armed attacks.

Since the international community should be held responsible for this situation, the following measures have to be applied:

1. Putting in place clear-cut financial policies to be applied through an agency which enables female refugees to ameliorate their human situation.
2. Integrating the gender approach in implementing the relief program (UNRWA).
3. Considering discrimination against female refugees as a crime against humanity.
4. Putting in place mechanisms to follow-up on the implementation of policies and programs intended to address to the situation of refugees, male and female.

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Palestinian women refugees:

The reality of defiance and the dream of return

Introduction

Before addressing the situation of Palestinian refugee women in refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territories, the following principles and assumptions must be reiterated:

- The right of the Palestinian people to return to their land and property and receive compensation for the material and moral losses they incurred due to the dispossession is a historical right grounded in the principles of international humanitarian law and enshrined in UN resolutions, primarily General Assembly resolution 194, which upholds three basic, complementary rights: the right to return, compensation, and the reinstatement of property.
- The right of return is closely linked to the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, which is an imperative of international law.

The question of refugees is a single, integrated issue in the framework of the unity between land and people; all attempts to divide the issue through the use of categories such as refugee, émigré, or exile must be rejected under all circumstances. Palestinian refugees do not only live outside Palestine, but also in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the territories occupied in 1948. More than a quarter of a million Palestinians live outside their original land and are refugees in their own country.

There are 687,245 refugees in the West Bank, 181,241 of them registered refugees living in 19 refugee camps. In the Gaza Strip, there are 961,546 refugees, 471,555 of

them registered refugees in refugee camps, according to figures from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). (Source: UNRWA)

In addition, Palestinians are still being forced out of their homes and lands. In 2006, 115,000 Palestinians were displaced from Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. In the West Bank, 198 communities face forced displacement because of their proximity to settlements or because they are located within so-called closed military zones. This number includes 81 communities (260,000 people) living in their own homes in closed military zones between the apartheid wall and the Green Line, pursuant to arbitrary military orders that restrict their movement through gates that isolate them from the rest of the West Bank. (Source: Palestinian Coalition for the Right of Return)

Upholding the basic rights of Palestinians and protecting them from human rights violations is the responsibility of the international community according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and other international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and its additional protocols (1977), and the 1966 covenants on civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, in addition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts, Security Council resolution 1325, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides international protection to refugee women and their children.

Palestinian refugee women in the occupied Palestinian territories

Palestinian refugee women from the generation of the dispossession and throughout successive generations have contributed to the preservation of national identity and the cohesion of the Palestinian family. They have preserved the experience of the dispossession and displacement in their memories and passed it on to later generations. In addition to the ordeal of homelessness and forced displacement, refugee women in the occupied Palestinian territories have suffered because of the occupation and its ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights. Refugee women

have participated in every stage of the Palestinian struggle; they have had a presence in all uprisings and revolts and have defended their people's right to return, the right to establish a Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem, and the right to self-determination. Refugee women have made a series of sacrifices: they are counted among the martyrs, the prisoners, and the wounded, and they have helped to create women's organizations whose objective is to mobilize women's energies to defend Palestinian national rights and change women's traditional roles. They have worked in women's centers to protect Palestinian culture and offer support to those families most harmed by occupation policies.

The plight of women refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories can be summarized as follows:

1. Denial of the right to return

The primary obstacle facing Palestinian refugees, particularly women and children, is the absence of a permanent solution some sixty years after their forced uprooting, although the right of refugees to return to their home's country is fully recognized in Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

2. Denial of basic human rights

Palestinian women refugees have lost the daily protection of their human rights as a result of occupation policies ranging from the random shelling of refugee camps, to assassinations and intentional killing, raids, large-scale arrest campaigns in refugee camps, extensive curfews, a policy of collective punishment, the military containment of the refugee camps, and house demolitions and the plowing under of land, underway in the Gaza Strip since the early 1970s and seen in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002 and in the Rafah refugee camp in 2003. As a result of the house demolitions and destruction of land, refugee women have found themselves without shelter for themselves and their families.

Currently, the plight of Palestinian women refugees in the Gaza Strip camps has increased as a result of the siege on the Strip, the closure of all border crossings, and the imposition of a policy of collective punishment. Since a majority of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live in refugee camps, women refugees and their children have been

deprived of basic needs such as food, medicine, and electricity. Women have expressed their rejection of the lethal blockade by going to the Rafah crossing, breaking the siege, and obtaining goods to fulfill their basic needs. The right to basic necessities is the right of every human being as enshrined in all international conventions.

3. Difficult living conditions of refugee women

Palestinian refugee camps lack the minimum standards for a normal life because of severe overcrowding, particularly in camps in the Gaza Strip. The land area of the camps has not changed for five decades, while the population has increased many times over and construction is prohibited except in certain cases where vertical construction is allowed. This situation has led to the deterioration of environmental and health conditions which disproportionately affect women and children and foster the spread of illness and disease.

Health and education services have declined because of cuts to UNRWA's budget, which prevents refugee women from obtaining basic maternal and natal health care.

Palestinian families in refugee camps are not provided with basic social security because of the occupation's constant interference in health and educational service centers and due to budget cuts and a reduction of services by UNRWA.

Women refugees face psychological trauma because of the loss of their homes and the forced temporary move to places not suited for habitation (Refugee families in Rafah, for example, have moved into schools).

There has been a severe economic decline in the occupied Palestinian territories in recent years, which has led to high rates of unemployment and poverty and affected the ability of refugee families to obtain necessities such as food and clothing. Refugee women are particularly affected by poverty as they try to find alternatives to feed their families. In the Gaza Strip, there is a shortage of basic goods, Palestinian exports have come to a halt, many workers have lost their jobs (35 percent of the Gaza economy relies on workers' wages), and construction has come to a standstill, causing grave losses to the private sector. All of this has had a negative impact on the living

condition of refugee women. Women refugees in the Gaza Strip are waging a battle against poverty side by side with women refugees in the West Bank, where poverty rates have increased because of military checkpoints, closures, and the construction of the apartheid wall.

4. Reality of discrimination against refugee women

Palestinian refugee women are denied UNRWA services if they marry a non-refugee, which is a blatant example of discrimination against refugee women.

Palestinian refugee women in the occupied Palestinian territories are a subset of Palestinian women, who face infringements on their political and civil rights because of:

- Prevailing Palestinian social culture, which is expressed in poor political, legal, and institutional representation for refugee women; and
- Institutional discrimination in the law, particularly the personal status law, which regulates issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and guardianship, alimony, and violence against women.

This means that certain interventions to reform the situation and narrow gender gaps have been merely a formal process that has not touched the fundamental discrimination faced by women. There are also gaps in the Palestinian penal code on issues of concern to Palestinian women, in addition to the absence of a law to protect the family from violence.

Refugee women in Lebanon: The violence of discrimination and violent discrimination

Introduction

In addition to gender discrimination, refugee women of all types in Lebanon face discrimination due to their refugee status and the social and economic vulnerability it entails. What distinguishes the status of refugee women in Lebanon is the blatant violation of their civil rights due to Lebanon's refusal to enforce the Casablanca Protocol, which stipulates non-discrimination between refugees and citizens in civil rights. Refugees must also deal with a plethora of authorities regulating their security status and services.

Lebanon has witnessed a growing influx of Iraqi women refugees since 2003 (there are an estimated 25,000–50,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon). This is in addition to the women who have been entering the country since the mid-1970s for political reasons, for whom there are no official statistics, and the many women refugees from Sudan, Somalia, and of Kurdish origin. However, the most important group of refugee women in Lebanon is Palestinian women. They are the longest-standing group, having come to Lebanon following the dispossession of 1948. Currently most statistics (from UNRWA, state sources, and the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO]) put the number of registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon at 400,000, or about 10 percent of the Lebanese population. These refugees must deal with the pain of the expulsion from their homes and the reality of forced exile because of the systematic discrimination they face in Lebanon.

Lack of effective international protection of human rights

Unlike most women refugees, Palestinian women refugees are exempted from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the authority of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), also established in 1951. Palestinian women refugees receive services from UNRWA, established in 1948. These services include three major types of humanitarian aid: education, health and social services, and aid. But UNRWA's authority to provide aid services is very limited and it has no authority

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to offer protection. Its prerogatives also do not allow it to engage in any sort of defense of the human rights of refugees. Unlike the UNHCR, UNRWA cannot intervene legally on behalf of refugees. Palestinian refugees are under the protection of the Lebanese government, while the government considers the refugees in Lebanon to be under the care of UNRWA. As a result, Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon face discrimination and violence because they lack legal independence; they have no rights in their native country because of the occupation, and they are not governed by the laws of the host country.

The status of Palestinian refugee women worsened after the Oslo Accords, when UNRWA was forced to take austerity measures and reduce its services to Palestinians in the Diaspora while it increased its aid to the Palestinian territories as part of its peace program. At the same time, the PLO cut back on its support services, which only exacerbated the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. “Today, all 12 official refugee camps in the Lebanon Field suffer from serious problems—no proper infrastructure, overcrowding, poverty and unemployment. The Lebanon Field has the highest percentage of Palestine refugees who are living in abject poverty and who are registered with the Agency’s ‘special hardship’ programme.”¹

In addition, Palestinian refugees who do not possess permanent documents or passports (an estimated 3,000–5,000 people) face severe difficulties. They do not benefit from UNRWA services because they are not registered, and while they should be covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention, Lebanon did not ratify the convention. As a result, this group of refugees lives in a state of legal limbo without any protection and faces the greatest hardship. They are denied the right to register, the right to a name and nationality, the right to education, the right to register marriages, and the freedom of movement.

“Miryam . . . is a non-ID Palestinian refugee. When interviewed by Amnesty International, she had been engaged for five years to a Lebanese man. However, she had not been able to get married as her marriage would not be legally recognized due

¹ UNRWA, Lebanon Refugee Camp Profiles, last updated 31 December 2006, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/lebanon.html>

to her lack of ID documents. Her family had been trying to obtain the necessary papers for her for years but without success and did not know anything more that they could do. She told Amnesty International that she was very depressed about her situation and its seeming hopelessness.”²

Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon and civil rights

All of the failings mentioned above are particularly harmful to Palestinian women refugees. The cutbacks to aid and services have overshadowed the needs of women and their particular points of vulnerability. The socioeconomic conditions of life in the refugee camps are very difficult, and the instability produced by wars, successive Israeli assaults on Lebanon, and civil wars and conflicts have taken a psychological toll. Palestinian women live an isolated life in the camps in closed quarters because of the permanent military presence around the camps (in southern Lebanon), which renders any development of their rights impossible.

In periods of war and conflict in Lebanon, Palestinian women refugees face forced migration and displacement in addition to the problems of displacement, poverty, discrimination, and gender-based and sexual violence. “Jamila is a Palestinian woman who was raped several times during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.”³ The best example is the ordeal endured by Palestinian refugees after their displacement from the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in 2007, which has left more than 30,000 Palestinians homeless.

Palestinian women suffer from the burden of long-standing refugee status and the repercussions of the inadequate enforcement of the Casablanca Protocol, which deprives them of their civil rights.⁴ They must rely on the international community in the form of UNRWA for health, educational, and aid services. Despite UNRWA’s efforts to reduce discrimination against women by placing them in decision-making positions, maintaining sex-disaggregated statistics, and creating development programs for women, the main obstacle to reducing discrimination against women is

² Amnesty International, October 2007, document no. MDE/18/010/2007.

³ UNIFEM, training program on women’s human rights, packet no. 10, p. 16.

⁴ See the report on Palestinian women refugees submitted to the CEDAW committee, January 2008, prepared by Aziza al-Khalidi.

the limited resources at UNRWA's disposal—resources that could turn these initiatives into real achievements. UNRWA also practices gender discrimination against refugee women by making the traditional patriarchal model the basis of qualification for its services: refugee status is inherited from the father.

Palestinian women in Lebanon face the dilemma of the absence of any authority responsible for protecting and supporting women's human rights. The fact that UNRWA is not authorized to provide such protection and the absence of support programs, particularly women's participation programs, has only further marginalized women.

Most Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon live in 12 refugee camps all over Lebanon. They are denied the right to adequate housing and face restrictions on maintenance and ownership. "Farah, a widow with three children living in Jal el-Bahr, said, 'In winter water comes through the corrugated iron roof. I am afraid to do repairs because we can be detained or fined.'"⁵ Palestinian refugee women living outside the camps are also denied the right to own, bequeath, or inherit a house or land and register property because of the ban on Palestinian ownership of housing and land. This makes women prisoners of the camps and undermines their right to adequate housing and the right to live in security, safety, and dignity.

Lack of protection for social, economic, and cultural rights

The socioeconomic reality in refugee camps in Lebanon is characterized by a denial of rights, the absence of job opportunities, cutbacks in PLO services and jobs, and reductions to UNRWA services, the combination of which has further entrenched poverty. The lack of protection for social and economic rights, increasing poverty, and deteriorating morale has a direct impact on women and girls. In turn, the conditions necessary for the development of women's rights—economic and professional independence (they require a work permit), education (registration in Lebanese public schools is extremely difficult), and social security (not provided to Palestinians)—are not sufficiently ripe to allow even a consideration of equal rights. Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon face discrimination on three levels: as women,

⁵ Amnesty International, October 2007, document no. MDE/18/010/2007.

as refugees, and as members of the poor class.

Poverty has a sizeable impact on Palestinian women refugees, particularly since women are breadwinners in one-fifth of Palestinian families. The burden on women to maintain their families is only growing heavier while support mechanisms and the ability to obtain education and jobs are on the retreat.

Since Palestinians in Lebanon do not have the right to work—in 2005 more than 70 professions were closed to Palestinians, and 20 are still closed to them today—unemployment is a major problem for Palestinian women. Women must work in the informal sector, where they are subject to exploitation and labor in the lowest-paid jobs. They work for twelve hours for less than half of what men make. Palestinian women who complete their secondary and university education can usually find work as teachers, nurses, or secretaries, but they must accept worse working conditions than their Lebanese peers—for example, they may forgo their right to paid vacations and accept lower wages and pensions. “Jamila works in a sock factory in Burj al-Barajina. She works for a daily wage because she has a Palestinian refugee identity card. Her meager wage barely meets her needs and those of her family. She says, ‘I know that my wages are low. If I weren’t a refugee I would have many job opportunities.’”⁶ Like Lebanese women, Palestinian refugee women bear the burden of discrimination growing out of the male culture when they do join the labor market, which has an impact on their wages and entails various violations.

UNRWA reports indicate that reduced budgets have had a tangible negative impact on Palestinian women’s health and education. Lebanon has the highest maternal mortality rate for Palestinian women (239 pregnancy-related deaths for every 1,000 live births). Health institutions and clinics are overburdened, and the crisis in health care has affected women, children, and the elderly. “Yasmin, who lives in El-Maachouk settlement, said: ‘My 14-year-old son broke his leg and needs a metal pin inserted, which costs LL 250,000. I can’t afford this, so he just sits at home.’”⁷ Schools are also overcrowded, have too few teachers, and lack administrative and

⁶ UNIFEM, training program on women’s human rights, packet no. 10, p. 16.

⁷ Amnesty International, October 2007, document no. MDE/18/010/2007.

supervisory capabilities. The absence of jobs has also raised the dropout rate.

The difficult living conditions have led to social fragmentation, desperation, crime, a rising extremist religious discourse, and social problems previously unknown in the refugee camps. All reports indicate that growing poverty and the denial of civil rights have reinforced the traditional behaviors and tendencies that undermine women's ability to receive an education, training, jobs, and health care, particularly reproductive health care.

Like Lebanese women, Palestinian refugee women suffer from personal status laws, which regulate their private lives and status. Palestinian refugee women also face all forms of violence against women: physical, sexual, psychological, legal, social, political, and economic, on all levels, particularly on the private level of the family. Here we should note UNRWA's failure to address violence against women and the poor showing of programs to combat violence and protect the dignity and rights of Palestinian women refugees. Violence against women in the Palestinian family is one of the main challenges facing Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon, as indicated by several studies.

Palestinian refugee women in Jordan

Introduction

Palestinian women refugees face great human suffering and live in harsh conditions wherever they may be, but particularly in the refugee camps spread across four Arab countries and inside Palestine. Some 1.7 million of the four million Palestinians living outside Palestine live in refugee camps. About 48 percent of them are women, or about 800,000 Palestinian women refugees, who live in camps.

The chief problem is that the period of refugee status has been prolonged for more than sixty years, and Palestinian refugees are still living in camps that do not provide the basic elements of a dignified life. They still face homelessness in every sense of the word: being uprooted from their original homeland, seeking refuge in another country, and entering a life of exile and alienation, along with the human sense of degradation at forced displacement and the attendant political repression, poverty, unemployment, and domestic violence.

There is a close relationship between the suffering of Palestinian women refugees and the political fortunes of the Palestinian cause, and year after year, women have borne the difficult conditions until the dream of return can be realized, after the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state, as enshrined in UN resolutions, despite the long years of political, social, and democratic struggle required.

Palestinian refugee camps

The UN established UNRWA in 1951 to provide the possibility of a life for everyone who qualified for Palestinian refugee status. According to UNRWA figures, one-third of Palestinian refugees, or some 1.3 million people, live in fifty-nine refugee camps spread across the area of UNRWA's operations in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, the West Bank, and Gaza. UNRWA defines a Palestinian refugee as a person or descendent of a person whose regular residence was in Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948. While the number of refugees registered with UNRWA in 1950 was

914,000, it has now reached more than five million, and this number is increasing due to natural growth. While UNRWA's condition for recognition as a refugee covers all those who lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the Israeli–Arab war in 1948 that led to the establishment of Israel on Palestinian territory, it should be remembered that the number of people who left and took refuge in neighboring countries without being registered as refugees, it is estimated by many studies that there number is three times that of refugees registered with UNRWA.

There are 2.5 million Palestinian women refugees, or about half (49 percent) of all Palestinian refugees who live in the 59 UNRWA-run camps inside and outside Palestine.

General facts about the status of refugees in Jordan

Jordan hosts 41 percent of the Palestinian refugees displaced in 1948, and 90 percent of Palestinians who have been displaced twice over, first to refugee camps in the West Bank in 1948, and thence to Jordan after the Israeli aggression of 1967. Over the years, more Palestinians have moved to refugee camps in Jordan. Palestinian women constitute 48 percent of refugees in the Jordanian camps; non-warehoused Palestinians constitute 60 percent of all refugees in Jordan.

Although the vast majority of Palestinian is carrying Jordanian citizenship as a result of the political ties between the West Bank and Jordan, no solution can be forced on refugees in Jordan that is not based on the right of self-determination and the right of return, as enshrined in international conventions and UN resolutions, particularly UN General Assembly resolution 194. There is a consensus that the right of return is a basic element of the discussion of a final settlement of the Palestinian issue.

Data on the status of Palestinian women refugees classified as hardship cases

In the first four decades of its operation, UNRWA had a general food aid program that provided to all. In 1978, however, UNRWA limited the program to refugees classified as hardship cases. They number some 27,000 families. Other important data help to outline the situation of Palestinian refugee women under UNRWA's mandate:

- Women constitute about 60 percent of hardship cases, some 44 percent of

which are female-headed families.

- Some 13.7 percent of women refugees are heads of households. The links between income, gender, and the labor market make these families most exposed to poverty and marginalization.
- The average living space for Palestinian families in the camps is 30.7 square meters.
- On average 2.4 people live in each room and 3.3 share each bedroom; it is expected that families, and even extended families, will share one home.

Data on violence against women refugees

UNRWA ignored domestic violence for many years. Based on a shift in UNHCR policies in 1990 to provide protection to women refugees from domestic violence, UNRWA, like other UN agencies, instituted programs to preserve the dignity of women and their rights. The policies included:

- Employing female staff to meet with abused women.
- Providing consultation and protection to abused women.
- Identifying abusers and violators.
- Offering services to abused women, including permanent solutions to refugee women at risk.

On the ground, however, these policies are only applied on an ad-hoc basis. Thus, all recommendations in this regard must go beyond instruction, standards, and honor agreements to touch practical conduct and offer real protection to abused women—for example, through the establishment of shelters.

Types of violence against refugee women

In conditions of displacement and over years of living in the camps, Palestinian refugee women have faced many forms of political violence in addition to domestic violence, honor crimes (family killings), and rape.

There are many examples of the violence endured by Palestinian women refugees over 60 years of displacement and life in the camps. These include the murder of civilians, the use of excessive force during peaceful demonstrations, genocide,

disappearances, arbitrary detention, and torture in pr

Palestinian women refugees in Syria

Palestinian women in Syria have borne a heavy burden of forced displacement, and its accompanying misery and desperation that contrasts sharply with the stable life they enjoyed prior to the dispossession. A discussion of Palestinian women in Syria and available livelihood opportunities provides a set of data necessary to understand where women fall in the system of production and how they bear responsibility with men for building a Palestinian family and society capable of living a dignified life. It also illustrates their capacity to play a role in all facets of the Palestinian struggle for their legitimate rights, first and foremost the right of return.

At the beginning of the dispossession, there were 85,000–90,000 Palestinians in Syria, some 49 percent of whom were women. As in other locations of Diaspora and exile, the early years of the Palestinian presence in Syria were characterized by harshness, few resources, and a lack of jobs for women, with the exception of heavy manual labor. Men assumed greater responsibility for providing for the family, providing for four persons on average. At this time, most Palestinian women were involved in domestic labor and fruit-picking on farms near the refugee camps, much like Palestinian women in Lebanon. As women's opportunities for education and training increased, however, the situation changed. A not-insignificant number of women assumed greater responsibilities and entered high-paying professions in Syria, such as engineering and medicine. Palestinian women's work in Syria was linked to education and access to it. Statistically speaking, 4.7 percent of women aged 16 or older hold a BA or higher; 7.9 percent hold a post-secondary education degree; 12.6 percent hold a high-school diploma; 14.4 percent hold a middle-school diploma, and 35.4 percent hold a primary-school diploma. Some 25 percent have less than a primary-school education. Illiteracy among Palestinian women in Syria stands at 20 percent. These figures come from the PLO's Palestinian Center for Statistics in Syria and the organization's refugee institution.

In recent years women have accounted for only 13 percent of Palestinian workers. This figure may be high compared to other Arab societies, but it is low in light of the

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fact that women constitute half of the 500,000 refugees living in Syria. Nearly 50,000 of these refugees came to Syria after the defeat of 1967, from Gaza, Jordan, or elsewhere, and others came after 1956; they are not subject to the same conditions that apply to Palestinians who came to Syria in 1948.

The refugee camp's view of working women has evolved positively in recent years. Even their marriage prospects have improved as a result of work, and Palestinian families are thus concerned about the education, professional training, and employment of their daughters. The most significant point to note regarding job opportunities for Palestinian women in Syria is that Syrian law treats Palestinian and Syrian women equally when it comes to government jobs; the private sector is also concerned with training, experience, and productive capacity. As a result, it has been relatively easy for Palestinian women to find respectable jobs in the Syrian public and private sectors. Palestinian women work as engineers, doctors, and teachers and occupy important, sensitive public positions. With the exception of elected office in the parliament, Palestinian women can enter virtually any job field. The fact that Palestinian women entered the labor market relatively early, became involved in public work, and assumed responsibility has ultimately had a positive impact on Palestinian society's ability to bear the burden of survival and struggle for the national cause.

Theoretically, extensive employment opportunities are open to Palestinian women in Syria, from the public sector and public service, to handicrafts, to intellectually stimulating jobs as writers and journalists, to work in politics and leadership positions within various Palestinian factions. These fields have opened to allow the development of a female work force and give women opportunities to shore up their social status and enhance their ability to take part in public and family life. It must be noted, however, that unemployment is high in Syria, which has had ramifications for Palestinian men and women both. With the presence of two million Iraqi refugees in Syria, high unemployment has affected the types of jobs open to Palestinian women as well as their wage levels.

Recommendations

To the United Nations

Political

1. Provide protection and security for refugee women in accordance with international conventions, which require encouraging UN member states to take measures against Israel pursuant to its violations of international law.
2. Take action to lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and reject Israel's policy of collective punishment.
3. Expand the prerogatives and authority of UNRWA to include the provision of legal protection for Palestinian refugees.
4. Ensure that the competent UN agencies redouble efforts to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees while devoting special attention to women refugees and the elderly who live by themselves.
5. Support UNCHR in providing necessary services to women refugees.
6. Collect and maintain sex-disaggregated statistics and data.

Economic

1. Support individual and collective empowerment programs for refugee women.
2. Address the cutbacks in UNRWA services.
3. Allocate budgetary resources to UNRWA to combat violence against women and gender-based violence.
4. Demand that the international community, particularly the General Assembly, given its responsibility for UNRWA, support and reinforce the agency's efforts to secure basic health services, education, and social services for Palestinian women and the general population.
5. Increase the resources given to UNRWA and strengthen links between UNRWA and the UNHCR, particularly in the exchange of information and experience on gender violence against women; the UNHCR should adjust its guiding principles to the needs of Palestinian women refugees.
6. Increase UNRWA's budget and devote special attention to women's needs.

- 19 - Karama is a movement to eliminate violence against women across the Arab world, looking at violence across eight realms: health, law, policy, economics, art and culture, media, education and religion. We believe that women united are a force for change. Our partners include women activists and leaders from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

To the international community:

1. Uphold the civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, including the right to return, while devoting special attention to the right to work, which can remove a sizeable obstacle in the path of the advancement of the women refugees.
2. Recognize the particularly vulnerable position of Palestinian women refugees, since they do not have a sovereign nation that would allow the implementation of the principle of mutuality in civil affairs, such as employment.
3. Ensure that donor institutions support civil society organizations that offer services to women refugees.

To States hosting Palestinian refugees:

1. Assume full responsibility for the protection of Palestinian women refugees and take all legal and administrative measures necessary to eliminate all forms of discrimination against them.
2. Take action to provide special support for the recognition of the right of Palestinian women refugees to work, enable them to exercise this right, and find opportunities for them.
3. Support government entities to focus efforts on helping women refugees, particularly victims of war and poverty.

Iraqi Women between Occupation and Trafficking

Introduction

Recent UN figures indicate that more than 4.5 million Iraqis have been displaced as a result of conflict—2.5 million inside Iraq, more than 1.5 million in Syria, 750,000 in Jordan, and 200,000 in Egypt and Lebanon—making this the largest refugee crisis in the Middle East since the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948, and the fastest-growing refugee crisis in the world. One in eight Iraqis have fled their homes, with more than half a million people forced to flee in just six months. Jordan and Syria have been hardest hit by the waves of refugees pouring out of Iraq, putting them first and third respectively in the list of top host countries in the world as a proportion of the population.

As with most refugee populations, roughly half of Iraqi refugees are women, and many have become heads of households after losing their husbands in the war. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are now as many as 8 million widows in Iraq. The records of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Iraq confirm that there are 400,000 widows in Baghdad alone, and 90 to 100 women are widowed every day due to hostilities, factional fighting, organized crime and terrorism. Widows constitute about 35 percent of the Iraqi population as a whole, 65 percent of Iraqi women, and 80 percent of married women of reproductive age. Having lost the support of a primary breadwinner, many Iraqi women have thus fled to neighboring countries in search of work.

The harsh conditions faced by Iraqi refugees make women and children particularly prone to exploitation. Many are turning to 'survival sex' for lack of other alternatives; and many do so with the knowledge and participation of family members, with male

heads of household bringing customers to the home. In light of this growing problem, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Erica Feller has stressed that the Iraqi refugee crisis goes beyond humanitarian assistance, but also requires protection of refugees who face neglect, harassment and exploitation.⁸

Many Iraqi refugee women are dealing with past trauma as a result of the conflict's random violence and/or as a result of targeted sexual and gender-based violence. Inside Iraq, women and girls are increasingly becoming targets for rape; and the kidnapping of men, women and children for ransom and torture is also prevalent. Once in the host countries, however, women victims of violence have little to no access to psychological and social support because it is either unavailable or unaffordable. Domestic violence in refugee households is also increasing with the strain of long-term displacement, lack of sustainable livelihoods, dwindling economic resources and fears of deportation—in addition to the trauma that men as well as women have suffered as a result of the conflict. Cultural barriers—including social stigma, cultural norms, lack of awareness of medical benefits from medical care after rape, and, in Jordan, the requirement that doctors report to the police women who seek medical care for rape—prevent many women from seeking help. Women refugees are also not receiving critical reproductive health care, because the services available to them are either insufficient or unaffordable, or because fear of deportation makes them unwilling to seek care.⁹ These are just some of the ways in which the insufficient or absent protection and assistance from host governments and the inability of the UNHCR to meet the needs of so many refugees are being felt.

⁸ “UN spotlights ‘survival sex’ among Iraqi women refugees,” AFP, 13 November 2007, <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5haiMkhrQqvmjbmIYICbkCnll0KSA>.

⁹ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, “Iraqi Refugee Women and Girls in Jordan: Reproductive Health Findings,” September 2007.

Iraqi refugee women in Syria

The Arab Republic of Syria has signed and acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and CEDAW, making it responsible for eliminating discrimination against and protecting refugee women within its borders. Government statistics put the number of Iraqi refugees in Syria as high as 2 million, 700,000 of whom have access to work. Having fled conflict in pursuit of an easier and more secure life, many Iraqi women are instead finding the opposite. Relief workers confirm that deteriorating and desperate living conditions among refugees, combined with Syria's already high unemployment levels, are pushing increasing numbers of Iraqi refugee women—and even young girls—into survival sex. “These women have no other option,” said Mai Brazi of the United Nations. “They have lost their husbands or parents in the war, and many of them live alone or support their families. They have been forced to sell their bodies.”

Visits to a women's prison in a Damascus suburb and the girls' reformatory in Bab Massla, where Iraqi women and girls are held on charges of prostitution, throw into grim relief the reasons they turned to sex work. Most of the women in these detention centers are very young, and most have been raped or orphaned. Poverty and the need to support themselves and their families force them into survival sex as the only livelihood option available. All have dropped out of school; none receive assistance from any local or international organization. These conditions—poverty, lack of access to education, lack of assistance—are common in refugee circles and feed into the spread of survival sex among Iraqi refugee women and girls.

So do the potential rewards, with dancers earning up to \$200 a day. This is not the standard wage however. Prostitutes earn less than dancers at up to \$50 a day. And many women sell themselves very cheaply, using record shops or sandwich stalls as a front through which to meet potential clients: sex tourists from elsewhere in the Middle East. Beauty and youth fetch a higher price—up to \$70 for the younger girls. Men prey on the desperation and hopelessness to which these girls have been reduced as a result of war.

Sister Marie-Claude al-Nadaf, the head of the Rai al-Saleh convent in Syria, which supports many women in cooperation with other Christian churches and organizations, tells the story of three sisters who take turns to go out at night to engage in prostitution in order to feed their children. This trade, she said, has been a common practice for three years now. By the convent's count, there are 119 female-headed households among Iraqi refugee families in the small district of Barza in Damascus, with many of the women looking for work outside the home for the first time.

The conflict in Iraq has also resulted in Syria becoming a transit country and a destination for trafficking in women and girls. Iraqi women fleeing poverty and violence are coerced into prostitution by trafficking networks, then exploited by night club or brothel owners who keep the bulk of their earnings. Traffickers played an important role in opening nightclubs in collaboration with brokers in Syria relying on the bodies of female Iraqis. Al Nigma nightclub alone, which is frequented by many tourists from the Gulf, has 35 Iraqi women and girls between 12 and 20 years old. Other nightclubs have even more. And with so many Iraqi prostitutes available, men are increasingly turning away from women of other nationalities. As appetites for Iraqi prostitutes increase, and without adequate support and protection services for refugee women and girls, the risk of exploitation and abuse grows ever higher.

“We come across increasing numbers of women in tough conditions who become more vulnerable to exploitation by being forced into prostitution,” says Lawrence Jolles, head of the UNHCR office in Damascus. “Fear of disgrace and shame means that the government and relief agencies do not know the true numbers of victims of human trafficking and prostitution.”

Muta' marriage (temporary marriage for pleasure), with brokers taking large sums of money from both bride and groom, has also become common practice in Syria. Traditionally these marriages usually lasted from a week to several months, but now, says Erica Feller, the 'weekend marriage' is on the rise. On Friday families marry off their daughters in traditional ceremonies to men who are willing to pay the price; the

couples divorce on Sunday. This practice, although not explicitly called prostitution, is in effect illicit sex as a means of securing livelihood.

So far no measures have been taken by the Iraqi government to rehabilitate or protect Iraqi refugee women and girls engaged in survival sex. Instead, the penal code calls for foreign women engaged in sex work to be deported. For Iraqi refugee women, this constitutes a violation of their right to non-refoulement, as granted by Article 3 of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Sex workers arrested by police are sent to prison or to juvenile detention centers. When the UNHCR tracks these detainees, it often finds that they have been released on bail—usually by those who forced them into prostitution in the first place. Moreover, neither the Ministry of Social Affairs nor its affiliated juvenile detention centers have even the most basic tools to address this growing problem, whether rehabilitation and reintegration programs for sex workers or mechanisms to support victims of trauma and exploitation. Their role is limited to holding young women until they are released by court order. One positive development is the contracting by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Damascus-based National Association for Developing Women’s Role to assist it in better addressing the needs of the women and girls in its care.

Syria’s lack of adequate means to address sexual abuse and exploitation among Iraqi refugee women reflects its wider difficulties in accommodating and supporting such large numbers of refugees. Syria’s population of 19 million was already suffering harsh economic conditions and high unemployment before the refugee crisis began. Rising prostitution is not the only problem they face now: the cost of living has risen dramatically, with food prices up by 30%, property up by 40% and rent up by 150%. The strain on infrastructure is similarly high: schools have begun to operate in shifts to accommodate the flood of new students, and average class sizes have increased from 24 to 44 students.¹⁰

Early in the crisis, Syria was the only country in the region not to have imposed strict regulations on the entry of Iraqi refugees, treating Iraqis as ‘guests’ and allowing them to enter without a visa and remain indefinitely. Now, however, although Syria

¹⁰ Faisal al-Miqdad, “Iraqi refugees in Syria,” *FMR*, Special issue: Iraq’s displacement crisis, June 2007, 19–20.

continues to allow Iraqi refugees to benefit from public schools and hospitals, it has imposed visa restrictions that will require Iraqis to obtain entry visas at the Syrian embassy in Baghdad and thus make entry much more difficult. The Syrian authorities have also forcibly repatriated a number of Iraqi refugees on the grounds that they have broken the law. Iraqi refugees in Syria are, however, prohibited from working legally and thus forced to turn to informal or illicit work to earn a living. A policy that makes it unlawful to work and then deports people for breaking the law puts Iraqi refugee women, particularly those driven to survival sex, at increased risk of forced repatriation. And although UN officials are aware of the scope of the problem, there has yet to be any serious or adequate effort on the part of the international community to improve protections for Iraqi refugee women and girls in Syria.

Case studies

Farah

Farah is a girl who left her family in Baghdad. She is obsessed with the fear that her family might discover where she is and what she is doing. “I’ll commit suicide if they discover the truth of my work, otherwise, my family itself will kill me,” she says. “I had no other option; we live like the dead.

“This is not a life for a 15-year-old girl who should be playing and having fun instead. I’m sure that deep inside, any girl like me has a desire to die. But there is no individual or institution that helps such girls.”

Lafif

Lafif, 14, still looks like a little girl, with her innocent features and hair pulled back in a pony-tail. She lives in Syria with her mother and two young brothers, and works as a prostitute in a nightclub. Not allowed to work legally in Syria, the family lived on savings until they ran out of money. Then her mother was forced to look for other ways to earn a living. “A woman came to my mother and offered her to send me to these places and my mother agreed,” says Lafif. “We were in need of money.”

Lafif gets \$30 for her work in the nightclub, \$100 when customers take her to a private villa. “I was arrested in a prostitution case and repatriated to Iraq, but I returned again with a forged passport. . . . I have three married sisters and four

brothers all living in Baghdad. . . . No one of my family in Iraq knows what I'm doing here.”

Salwa

Salwa fled to Syria earlier this year after armed men murdered her husband, who worked as a barber. She turned to prostitution after she failed to find a job in Syria. She says she earns \$300 and sometime \$500 a week from her new work.

Nada

Nada, 16, says that her father left her at the Iraqi–Syrian borders after the son of her parental uncle had deflowered her. Five Iraqis took her from the border to Damascus. They raped and sold her to a woman who forced her to work in nightclubs and private villas. She is now being held in a government-affiliated protection center awaiting repatriation.

Iraqi refugee women in Egypt

It is difficult to obtain information about the situation of Iraqi refugee women in Egypt. It is an issue that does not receive significant attention, and hence the available research and analysis on how Iraqi refugees are coping in Egyptian society remains inadequate.

Some information can be gleaned through government policies on entrance and residence visas with regard to Iraqis. The Refugees' Sector in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates the number of Iraqis in Egypt at 130,000. The majority of these are not registered refugees, however, but in Egypt on tourist and other visas. Moreover, this number might have doubled had it not been for the Egyptian government's actions to restrict tourist visas to Iraqis: in August 2006, the government stopped renewing Iraqis' three-month tourist visas; and last March it stopped granting tourist visas to Iraqis at all. Some of the refugees who came to Egypt in recent years have returned to Iraq or relocated to Syria. Tourist visas do not permit legal work or allow children to attend public schools, making it difficult for a family to establish itself in Egypt with any kind of stability. And at the same time as many Iraqis had run out of savings, Egypt was hit by steep inflation on basic goods.

Yet there exists now in Egypt what is called by observers a 'residence marriage,' whereby an Iraqi can obtain a three-year residence permit if he or she marries an Egyptian. This residence permit is renewable as the marriage continues; it is made permanent if children result of the marriage. This is true even when the mother is Egyptian, since recent changes to the Egyptian nationality law allow a woman to pass on her nationality to her children. Only a small fraction of the total Iraqi population in Egypt takes advantage of this admittedly narrow option: in 2006, 570 Iraqi men married Egyptian women (putting them first among men from Arab countries), and 432 Iraqi women married Egyptian men.

The marriage is usually arranged through a broker, and both the broker and the Egyptian spouse obtain a large sum of money in the process. For the most part, these marriages are financial and practical transactions that end once the residence permit is obtained; this is especially true for Iraqi women.

Some Iraqi refugees do marry Egyptians to create stability and start a family, not just for the sake of a residence permit. Some of these mixed couples now have children and live scattered across Cairo and Giza, in some cases forming distinct communities. Many Iraqis jokingly call Sixth of October City ‘the twentieth governorate of Iraq’ because so many Iraqi communities, coffee houses and supermarkets have grown up there in recent years. Successful marriages such as these have led to an increase in the number of people working as brokers to negotiate similar marriages for other Iraqi refugees. This has resulted in a booming trade that exploits the lack of legal status among Iraqi refugees, since brokers typically demand fees incommensurate with refugees’ precarious situation. There have been reports of fees as high as LE 30,000. Men guarding blocks of flats where such mixed couples live also obtain large commissions from both bride and groom.

However, the success stories for this type of marriage are limited. Many have failed for a variety of reasons: lack of understanding between the couples; requests for divorce once the residence permit is obtained; or mercenary intentions on the part of the Egyptian spouse, who marries an Iraqi refugee only for material gain in the knowledge that those who come to Egypt are better off than their counterparts in Jordan or Syria.

Iraqi refugees can also obtain a five-year residence permit in Egypt through business, for instance by establishing a company or setting up a supermarket in an area with a high concentration of Iraqis, e.g., Sixth of October City, al-Arish Street in the Haram area, and Nasr City.

Iraqi refugee women in Jordan

Jordan has the second largest number of Iraqi refugees in the region, but not enough has been done to assess their conditions and needs, especially with regard to the most vulnerable among them and the particular situation of Iraqi refugee women. What is clear is that life for Iraqi refugees in Jordan is made more difficult as a result of government policies with regard to their status. Jordan's decision not to recognize Iraqis as refugees means most are in the country illegally, subject to arrest and deportation, and not allowed to work. Many have been surviving on savings since their arrival, but with little access to sustainable income these savings are becoming seriously depleted. Working unlawfully makes refugees, both men and women, susceptible to abuse and exploitation. Since men are more likely to be arrested and deported, it is often women who go out to work. With no recourse to protection, this puts them at increased risk of being forced into sex work to sustain themselves and their families.

Sex work is a growing problem among Iraqi refugees in Jordan, and indeed across the region, although its full extent has not been documented. The conflict has increased the trafficking of Iraqi women and girls to be sex workers in the illicit markets of Yemen, Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States. The women are lured by promises of legitimate work, for example in domestic service, and discover too late that they have been coerced into prostitution.¹¹ Representatives of NGOs have said that in Jordan "sex workers are identified by word of mouth, and taxi drivers openly ask male passengers whether they are interested in such services."¹² Families made vulnerable by insecurity, poverty, displacement and social disintegration are prime targets for traffickers and procurers.

Most Iraqi refugee women, however, are university graduates whose knowledge and skill could, if they had access to legitimate employment, contribute significantly to the Jordanian economy. Their difficult living conditions, and the exploitation and abuse

¹¹ Henia Dakkak, "Tackling sexual violence, abuse and exploitation," *FMR*, Special issue: Iraq's displacement crisis, June 2007, 40–42.

¹² Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, "Iraqi Refugee Women and Girls in Jordan: Reproductive Health Findings," September 2007, 7.

to which they are subjected through insufficient access to secure livelihoods, can in large part be attributed to the lack of national and international attention and support.

Among the few studies that have so far been done to identify the most vulnerable segments of the Iraqi refugee population and accurately assess their living conditions is one conducted by the Norwegian FAFO Institute for Applied International Studies, through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Jordanian government. This study found that:

- Eighty percent of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan fled Baghdad and its surrounding areas, Basra, Ninewa and Anbar, after the US invasion in 2003 because of the deteriorating security and economic conditions under the American occupation.
- The majority of the Iraqi refugees are highly educated. Half of refugees over 25 are university graduates or hold post-graduate degrees. Forty percent of Iraqi women refugees in Jordan are university graduates.
- The numbers of male and female refugees are roughly equal.
- By age the Iraqi refugee population breaks down thus: 52 percent are over 25; 20 percent are between 15 and 25; and 28 percent are children under 15.
- Most Iraqi refugees in Jordan are of Arab origin, with minorities of Kurds and Turkmen. They include Muslims (mostly Sunnis) and Christians.
- Most Iraqi refugees live in the Jordanian capital, Amman.
- The most prominent economic problem facing Iraqi refugees is unemployment. Only 22 percent work (of these, 60 percent have their own business and the rest work in a variety of professions). Immigration laws prohibit the majority from working legally, since they do not have legal residence permits. Some refugees depend on financial support from their relatives living outside the Middle East region.
- Jordan has estimated the cost of hosting Iraqi refugees since the war in 2003 at approximately \$1 billion.
- Decision-makers refuse to legalize the stay of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis living in Jordan, despite calls by international human rights organizations to stop treating them as illegal immigrants subject to arrest, fines and deportation.

- Jordan has imposed stringent border security measures to reduce the number of Iraqis entering the country. Among the government's concerns are security and demographic change.
- One of issues that needs urgently to be resolved is family reunification; some refugee families have been split, with some members having fled to Jordan leaving others behind in Iraq.
- In absence of legal work, Iraqi refugees in Jordan struggle with the high cost of living and the additional burden of various official fees and expenses.
- The report concludes that countries involved in the war against Iraq, in particular the United States and the United Kingdom, bear a heavy responsibility for the millions of Iraqis displaced by the conflict; they and the United Nations must do more to assist and protect Iraqi refugees.

In the absence of government support, several national and international organizations have stepped in to assist and protect Iraqi refugee women. Their main focus is to address the most urgent problems facing women refugees on a daily basis. These include basic needs such as education, health care and empowerment; psychosocial support; assistance and protection for women victims of violence, including space in women's shelters; and legal assistance. In addition, efforts have been made to increase coordination among service providers in order to improve the quality of the services available. While these efforts do their best to fill the gaps in protection and assistance, they are nonetheless a patchwork of solutions for problems that require a coordinated and targeted response from national and international institutions, government and civil society.

The Jordanian Women's Association, which has the advantage of a widespread presence across the country (with offices in Amman, al-Fahis, al-Zarqa, al-Ramtha, Aglon, Arbed, al-Sald, Madaba and al-Wahdat), has made a consolidated effort to address the needs of Iraqi refugee women. It offers psychosocial support to help women deal with the combined traumas related to their flight and the war they have fled, and has programs in place to help meet refugee women's basic needs: supplying teachers in various specializations to help Iraqi children make up for the gaps in their education as a result of conflict and displacement (the average is two missed years of

school); vocational education programs to empower women refugees; coordinating with authorities to provide access to health services, particularly for women residing in the Association's women's shelter; and establishing a special clinic for Iraqi refugees. The women's shelter established a special hotline for Iraqi women victims of violence. Some Iraqi women live at the shelter, either for financial reasons or because they need protection: the inter-religious violence that is fuelling the conflict inside Iraq has spread into Jordan along with the refugees, and Iraqi refugee women in Jordan remain at risk for religious reasons. Finally, the Association provides cultural events and other entertainment for Iraqi refugees, both adults and children, allowing them to escape from the pressures of their daily lives and refresh their minds and spirits.

Case study: One Iraqi refugee woman's experience in Jordan

A 34-year-old Iraqi Shiite woman who married a Sunni man after the death of her husband was forced to leave Iraq after receiving death threats from her family, which strongly opposed her marriage. She fled to Jordan with her husband and her daughter by her first marriage. When they first arrived, neither the woman nor her husband was legally able to work because of government restrictions on Iraqis in Jordan. Their economic situation was very difficult, and as an illegal immigrant the woman's daughter had no access to education.¹³ When the woman gave birth to a second child, also a girl, their economic situation deteriorated. By this time, however, the woman had sought asylum through the UNHCR and obtained asylum-seeker status, giving her limited rights and protections and enabling her to work legally. She found work as a maid and was able to support her family until she became pregnant with her third child and became unable to work. Her husband, who lacked legal status in Jordan, found work in the informal sector, but was eventually arrested and forcibly repatriated.

Alone, unable to work, with no financial assistance and no money to pay her hospital bills or support her children, the woman contacted the Jordanian Women's

¹³ Although the Jordanian government has allowed 50,000 Iraqi children to attend public schools without a residence permit, more must be done to ensure the right of refugee girls and boys to education.

Association hotline in desperation. The Association arranged for her to deliver her third child at the Red Crescent hospital free of charge and took action to obtain financial for her as soon as possible. She is now receiving psychosocial support from an expert affiliated with the Association to ease her suffering.

Recommendations:

1. Host governments and UN agencies on the ground should streamline collaboration to ensure that refugee women and girls receive adequate and effective protection and assistance. Host governments should not, however, leave to UN agencies responsibilities that fall to them under national and international law.
2. Greater efforts should be made to ensure that refugee women and girls are able to exercise their right to shelter, education and health care, including reproductive health care, without discrimination.
3. Closer analysis needs to be made of the situation with regard to refugee women and girls in particular to identify and act on their specific needs and concerns.
4. Host countries should remove restrictions on legal residence and the right to work for refugees and allow them to access safe and secure livelihoods.
5. Countries of first asylum, especially Syria and Jordan, should keep their borders open to Iraqis fleeing the conflict and grant *prima facie* recognition to Iraqi refugees to ensure that they are entitled to the rights and protections refugee status incurs.
6. Jordan and Lebanon should accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1969 Protocol, and ensure that national legislation corresponds to the commitments laid out in international law.
7. The international community, in particular the United States, the United Kingdom and other states involved in the war against Iraq, should provide greater international assistance to countries of first asylum to share the burden of hosting and protecting refugees fleeing the conflict. For example, part of the massive

military budget should be reallocated to ensure assistance and protection to the millions of Iraqis displaced by the conflict.

8. Greater efforts must be made to find a political solution to conflict. The United States, the United Kingdom and other states involved in the occupation should fully shoulder their responsibility for establishing peace and security in Iraq in order to make voluntary repatriation a viable option for refugees.

Sudanese refugee women in Egypt

UNHCR figures for 1994–2005 put the number of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers at just under 60,000, including those whose interviews were suspended in 2004 and those whose files have been closed.¹⁴ This does not, however, reflect the true number of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, since it does not count Sudanese nationals who have never applied to UNHCR for their status as refugees to be recognized and whose numbers it is impossible to estimate.¹⁵

The problems Sudanese refugees as a group face in Egypt have arisen primarily within the last 15 years. Prior to 1995, an agreement between Egypt and Sudan gave Sudanese nationals in Egypt enjoyed virtually the same rights—including access to employment, education and health care—as Egyptians. These rights were rescinded, however, when the political situation between the two countries deteriorated.¹⁶ Since then, even recognized Sudanese refugees, who enjoy fully the right to reside in Egypt and move freely around the country, have faced often insurmountable restrictions on their access to stable employment in the formal sector (including bureaucratic and fee-based hurdles to obtaining a work visa), which in turn has reduced their ability to pay for housing, food, education and health care. The limited assistance that they can get from the UNHCR does little to ease the difficulties of daily life. The situation for failed asylum seekers (whose applications for refugee status have been rejected by the UNHCR) and for unregistered refugees who remain in the country illegally is even

¹⁴ Our purpose here is to highlight the problems facing displaced Sudanese women overall, which are similar across the legal categories of refugee status. We thus do not adopt an exclusively legal definition of refugee, but apply the term broadly.

¹⁵ Fateh Azzam, ed., “A Tragedy of Failures and False Expectations: Report on the Events Surrounding the Three-month Sit-in and Forced Removal of Sudanese Refugees in Cairo, September–December 2005,” FMRS, June 2006.

¹⁶ Egypt abrogated the Wadi al-Nil treaty, which had granted broad reciprocal rights to Egyptians and Sudanese, following an assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak that was blamed on Sudanese extremists. (Azzam ed., 2006, 8) Abrogation of the treaty was not retroactive, thus Sudanese who arrived prior to 1995 and have kept their papers in order still have access to many of the rights they enjoyed under the treaty. (Katarzyna Grabska, “Living on the Margins: The Analysis of the Livelihood Strategies of Sudanese Refugees with Closed Files in Egypt,” FMRS Working Paper No. 6, June 2005, 43.)

more precarious due to their legal vulnerability and lack of access to protection mechanisms. The fear of arrest and deportation makes refugee women in this situation especially vulnerable to abuse, harassment and exploitation, and leaves them no recourse to justice when these occur. Even programs set up to support refugee women, such as the sexual and gender-based violence program at AMERA in Cairo, express frustration that there is little they can do to help, since bringing cases of violence and abuse to police do little more than re-traumatize the victims and in some cases put them at increased risk of deportation; justice is rarely—if ever—served.¹⁷

The majority of Sudanese refugees in Egypt are from South Sudan, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. All of them belong to tribes that have special African traditions. Each tribe has its own distinctive dialect and cultural traditions, to which all members adhere. They live in communities scattered across Cairo, and most had not traveled outside Sudan before seeking asylum in Egypt.

Obstacles to local integration

Whether their status is recognized or not, Sudanese refugees face serious obstacles to integrating into Egyptian society. The official policy of the Egyptian government is to oppose local integration as a durable solution for refugees. Its policies with regard to refugees' right to work and access to public services reflect this position.¹⁸ Furthermore, as with many host countries, particularly in the developing world, the Egyptian government and media use refugees and illegal migrants as scapegoats for wider social problems, linking them with rising crime, prostitution, and the demoralization of Muslim society as a result of the “loose morals and provocative manners” commonly attributed to African women.¹⁹ Deterioration of the economic situation in Egypt has been marked by growing xenophobia and racism, partly as a result of this kind of scapegoating and partly due to the commonly held belief that African migrants are a burden rather than an asset to the economy.²⁰ Sudanese refugee

¹⁷ Personal interviews.

¹⁸ Its policy on health services is one exception. See below for details.

¹⁹ Grabska 75.

²⁰ As Grabska argues, however, the net contribution of Sudanese refugees to the local economy is usually greater than that of their Egyptian counterparts: they pay higher rents and often must rely on remittances to cover their living expenses. The view of refugees as a burden on society, and the restriction of their right to work, also dismisses their potential to contribute, whether through professional skills or as entrepreneurs and job-makers (Grabska 2005, 69–70).

women, particularly those from the South, whose darker skin makes them stand out, have complained of verbal and sometimes even physical harassment from Egyptians in the street, including having stones, water or food thrown at them. In addition to the feelings of insecurity that arise from this kind of harassment, it contributes to the gender gap in education. Parents and community leaders are sometimes reluctant to let girls go to school because they are more vulnerable than boys to street harassment and abuse.²¹ These local attitudes combine with cultural traditions and insularity to keep Sudanese refugees largely separate from the host community, except with regard to work.

Livelihoods and exploitation

The question of livelihoods among Sudanese refugee women is complex. Most young Sudanese refugees, male and female, do not go beyond the preparatory school level in education. Although children of recognized refugees have access to Egyptian public education at the primary level, most families cannot send all their children to school either due to lack of funding or because of limited opportunities beyond the primary level.²² Moreover, the vast majority of Sudanese women refugees who came to Egypt as adults are illiterate. With limited professional and academic skills and the restrictions on employment as a result of Egyptian government policy, the majority of jobs available to Sudanese refugees are in the low-skilled sector, which is easier for women to access than men. Sudanese women refugees tend to work in the domestic sector and earn on average LE 400–600 per month compared to LE 250–350 for men.²³ And many men, particularly those who are married or highly educated, prefer to stay home rather than work in exploitative and low-paying jobs.²⁴ Women thus often become the principal breadwinners in their families. On the one hand, this empowers them within the household: they are able to make economic decisions for the family, assert their power in relation to their husband, and stand up to harassment or abuse. On the other hand, many do not consider being the main income-earner to be an advantage. Some mourn the loss of their traditional homemaking and child-caring roles. The majority work long hours (sometimes 10–12 hours a day), which

²¹ Dingemans, 25.

²² Grabska, 41.

²³ Grabska, 61.

²⁴ Grabska, 64.

contributes to illness and exhaustion, and receive less than the minimum wage, and many are subject to harassment and abuse—often verbal, sometimes physical—from their employers.²⁵

Sudanese refugee women, and particularly young girls, have reported being shouted at by their Egyptian employers, insulted and called lazy, threatened with firing, and having their salaries withheld for several months at a time or being paid less than their agreed wage. Many are forbidden from using bathroom facilities in their employers' homes or drink water from cups. Others have been accused of theft and fired without being given their final payment.²⁶ A small number of Sudanese women have died in their employers' homes in unclear circumstances, increasing feelings of insecurity among other women doing domestic work.²⁷ Those without legal status are afraid to report abuses to police and thus have no recourse to justice. Lack of legal status also means refugee women are afraid to travel in search of work, sometimes even short distances. Poor working conditions, low salaries and employer abuse lead Sudanese refugee women and men to change their work quite often, increasing the financial and emotional instability they already face as a result of conflict, displacement and the various obstacles they face in Egyptian society.²⁸

In addition, frustration among Sudanese men unable to find work, and forced to take on the responsibilities for child-care that were formerly the province of women, exacerbates tensions in the home. It has been widely documented that these kinds of frustrations in displaced populations lead to increased domestic violence. This, combined with Sudanese refugee women's greater economic independence and arguments over their wages, contributes to divorce and separation within refugee families and increases feelings of instability.

Housing

Warehousing is not an option for Sudanese refugees in Egypt, and the vast majority live in Cairo. They are not eligible for the rent-controlled housing available to

²⁵ Grabska, 65.

²⁶ Grabska, 67.

²⁷ Esther Dingemans, "Education Needs and Priorities for South Sudanese Refugees in Cairo," Field Report, February 2002, 16.

²⁸ Grabska, 67.

Egyptians, however, and prices for foreigners—even refugees—are exponentially higher. Many live in slums with poor sanitation and few services. And many live in cramped, overcrowded conditions, leading to lack of privacy, greater insecurity and stress.²⁹ Women living alone are not accepted by the community, which sees them as immoral.³⁰

Health care

Access to health care for Sudanese refugee women is not as difficult as for their Iraqi counterparts in Jordan, but it nonetheless holds significant challenges. Registered refugees have access to health services offered by the UNCHR in cooperation with church-run hospitals. And in 2005, the Egyptian government granted all Sudanese refugees access to health care at government institutions. However, these services do not subsidize surgery, expensive medicines or long-term care, thus doing little to help the many refugees who suffer from illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Moreover, most refugee women and men are not aware of the services and assistance available to them, whether from government clinics or NGOs, mosques and churches. And misinformation spread by word of mouth within the community, including rumors of refugees in particular being targets for organ theft in hospitals, prevents many refugee women from accessing services to which they are entitled.³¹ Refugee women also face difficulty accessing health services in emergencies, including delivery, whether for financial reasons or due to the distance between home and hospital. The end result is very often heightened stress and depression.

UNHCR and other support

Compounding the difficulties Sudanese refugee women face securing their basic rights to education, health, shelter and livelihoods are obscure and rigorous UNHCR policies on status determination, as well as lack of clarity about policy changes, such as the suspension in 2004 of all asylum applications, including for refugees from Darfur.³² Meanwhile, although the UNHCR's mandate is protection and assistance to refugees, the agency's resources have been cut even as the number of refugees

²⁹ Azzam, 14–15.

³⁰ Grabska, 52.

³¹ Azzam ed., 17.

³² Azzam ed., 10.

requiring assistance and the cost of living have increased. Pressure on the agency is heightened by the Egyptian government's refusal to shoulder its responsibilities as a signatory to both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention. It should be the government, for example, not the UNHCR that determines legal status, although the agency has been doing it since 1954 and expending resources on status determination that could otherwise be used for protection.³³ Ultimately the result has been mounting frustration and disaffection among Sudanese refugees, as well as growing distrust of UNHCR and its willingness and ability to protect. These frustrations came to a head in late 2005, when thousands of Sudanese refugees—men, women and children—engaged in a sit-in before the UNHCR offices to protest lack of transparency in UNHCR's refugee status determination procedures and the living conditions for Sudanese refugees in Cairo, which many consider untenable. Although the protest itself was peaceful, it ended tragically when at least 27 people, half of them women and children, were killed during the forced removal of protestors by Egyptian police.

Egyptian and Sudanese civil society organizations, as well as regional and international organizations, have played a positive role in providing protection and assistance to refugees. Their reach is limited, however, and more needs to be done to ensure that Sudanese refugee women in Egypt are able to exercise their rights under international law, and that the organizations that support them do so effectively.

Conditions for voluntary repatriation

With resettlement an option limited to only a fraction of refugees and local integration a solution supported by neither Sudanese refugees nor the Egyptian government, voluntary repatriation is the best durable solution for Sudanese refugees in Egypt. Serious problems must be addressed, however, before conditions in Sudan will permit refugee women and men to return safely to their homes.

Ongoing conflict in Darfur

³³ Pascale Gazaleh, "In 'closed file' limbo: displaced Sudanese in Cairo," FMR 16, January 2003, <<http://www.fmreview.org/text/FMR/16/08.htm>>.

Darfur is still the scene of ongoing conflict that continues to cause massive displacement, both within Darfur and into neighboring Chad, which has seen not only an influx of refugees but also the outbreak of conflict as a result, and has threatened to forcibly repatriate more than 250,000 refugees. Internally displaced women living in camps in Darfur remain at high risk of sexual and gender-based violence, which has been used as a weapon of war in this conflict. With the resurgence of fighting between the Sudanese government troops and the armed militant groups in Darfur, more people are fleeing to neighboring countries.

Post-war reconstruction in South Sudan

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South Sudan in 2005 ended a three-decade civil war. Under this agreement, donor countries and international institutions pledged to bear the cost of infrastructure projects and voluntary repatriation of refugees in South Sudan, which is rich in natural resources. But decades of conflict have taken a harsh toll. And while the government in South Sudan has begun the long process of reconstruction, much still remains to be done. Indeed, many have said that it is *construction* and not *reconstruction* that is needed in South Sudan, so great are the challenges to building the infrastructure necessary to support its population and ensure basic rights and services, such as potable water, health care, education and paved roads. The territory needs comprehensive and gender-sensitive economic, social and cultural development, particularly challenging in view of the high levels of illiteracy and low skills levels of both many returning refugees and South Sudanese who were never displaced.

Comprehensive reconstruction, however, is an essential step that must be taken before the South Sudan can handle a large influx of returnees, who themselves will need support to reestablish themselves after years of displacement. So far, donor countries have not honored their funding commitments in support of reconstruction and reintegration projects in South Sudan. And the UNCHR yet to receive the \$63 million it requested to fund resettlement and reintegration of over 80,000 people in 2008. The director of UNHCR's Bureau for Africa, Marjon Kamara, has indicated that without this support, the challenges blocking resettlement and reintegration will only get worse. And without a supportive environment for reintegration in South Sudan,

refugees who have returned may be displaced a second time, and those who have not may be increasingly reluctant to return.

Recommendations:

1. The UNCHR office in Cairo should work to solve the problems of refugee women and build their confidence in its ability to assist and protect them in accordance with its mandate. It should offer minimum acceptable conditions appropriate for life. Closed files should be reopened and processed transparently, according fully with the UNHCR's own guidelines on the process; asylum applications for refugees from Darfur should be resumed.
2. The UNCHR should allocate more financial resources to its office in Cairo to ensure that it can fulfill its obligations toward refugee women.
3. The Egyptian government should abide fully by its commitments under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention on refugees. It should remove bureaucratic and fee-based restrictions that prevent refugees from exercising their right to work. And it should shoulder its responsibilities with regard to status determination in order to free the UNHCR to fulfill its mandate of protection and assistance.
4. Donor countries and international entities should increase financial and in-kind assistance to refugees in order to speed resettlement in countries of asylum, and effectively implement post-war reconstruction and comprehensive economic and cultural development efforts, particularly in South Sudan, so that voluntarily resettlement becomes a viable option for refugees.
5. Targeted programs should be put in place to support of women breadwinners, school dropouts and victims of violence. These should offer psychosocial and educational rehabilitation as well as skills training, including but not limited to handicrafts, to encourage secure livelihoods.
6. Greater efforts should be made to reduce illiteracy among women and provide awareness and training to mothers about children's health.

- 43 - Karama is a movement to eliminate violence against women across the Arab world, looking at violence across eight realms: health, law, policy, economics, art and culture, media, education and religion. We believe that women united are a force for change. Our partners include women activists and leaders from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

7. More education opportunities should be made available for Sudanese girls and young women in schools, institutes and universities.
8. Support should be given to NGOs working in fields related to refugee services, including through capacity building for staff to help them be more effective in their efforts.
9. Pressure should be put on the governments in refugees' countries of origin to change their policies and adopt others more focused on their peoples' rights to security and stability. Furthermore, governments should live up to their responsibility to guarantee and protect human rights in order to create an environment of peace and security.

Stateless women in Somalia

As a result of its ongoing internal conflicts, Somalia has had no effective central government since 1991. Many observers have thus described Somalia as “a nation without a state,” and the absence of those institutions necessary to organized political life and real governance has meant that in practical terms Somalis as a group can truthfully be called ‘stateless.’

Somali statelessness is outside the agreed international definition of the term,³⁴ and thus falls outside the mandate of the UNHCR. But Somalis share with other stateless persons the inability to exercise the civil and political rights conferred by citizenship, as well as the lack of national protection that a state normally provides. Without access to the basic services and support of a centralized government, the burden on citizens of supplying or making up for those services increases. The scale of the current crisis, however, is such that individuals and communities alone are unable to fill the vacuum left by an absent government. Already this year, thousands of Somalis have been hit by water shortages due to drought, and thousands more were displaced in the floods that swept East Africa at the end of 2006. The impact of both disasters has been exacerbated by years of neglect of Somalia’s infrastructure. Meanwhile, the country is wracked by a market crisis, with hyperinflation stifling income-generating opportunities and making even basic goods out of the reach of the poorest Somalis. In January, the UN put the number of people needing food assistance at nearly 2 million.³⁵ But rising insecurity hampers aid agencies in their efforts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, and road blocks, taxation and banditry block movement and the transport of essential supplies. With widespread insecurity, piracy along the coast threatening food shipments, and no national institutions able to deal with famine and

³⁴ The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has a strictly legal definition of a stateless person as someone “who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law,” or what is known as *de jure* statelessness. [UNHCR and International Parliamentary Union, “Nationality and Statelessness: A Handbook for Parliamentarians,” 2005.]

³⁵ UN, Somalia Humanitarian Overview, Vol. 1, January 2008.

disease, over a million Somalis have fled their country and that many more have been internally displaced; over 260,000 people fled their homes in the final months of 2007 alone.³⁶

For Somali women, the impact of the ongoing conflict—described by the Red Cross in 2007 as the worst fighting in 15 years—is amplified by their *de facto* statelessness. Efforts to establish a functioning Somali government have so far done little to address the specific ways in which women are affected by the political and humanitarian crises. The exclusion of women from state-building initiatives means that national and international institutions do not know what women’s most urgent priorities are, or what key changes will make the biggest difference to women’s lives. Insecurity and rising fundamentalism exacerbate women’s exclusion, and thus also the lack of attention to women’s real needs.

Somali women’s political power has been seriously undermined by the sexualization of the conflict through mass rape, used as a weapon to harm the social cohesiveness of the clans. As women’s mobility is restricted by the risk of sexual violence, so too is their access to education and training, paid work, and secure livelihoods in general. The break-up due to conflict and migration of traditional clan-based support and protection mechanisms,³⁷ together with the lack of any working alternative, has further disempowered women: those who once could rely on family or clan assistance to escape poverty are now turning increasingly to survival sex; trafficking in women and children is on the rise; and little is done to prevent the seizure of a woman’s assets and properties by her husband or his family upon separation, divorce or bereavement. The combination of dwindling economic contributions and growing vulnerability means that women and girls are increasingly seen as a burden on the family and community, rather than as a vital resource.

³⁶ OCHA Regional Office for Central and East Africa, Displaced Populations Report, July–December 2007, Issue 2.

³⁷ ‘Social assistance’ refers to support given by members of the clan to individuals and families who cannot meet their subsistence needs. ‘Social insurance’ is a system that covers clan members, both male and female, in the event of inter- or intra-family disputes, appropriation of property or assets, marital discord, individual or inter-family violence, etc.

The true picture of women's economic contributions, however, is very different. More than half—and in some places 70 to 80 percent—of Somalia's breadwinners are women. Moreover, up to 90 percent of Somali households depend for their survival on income generated by women.³⁸ It is clear that women play a vital role in the country's economic health, but policy- and conflict-related restrictions on mobility, employment, and even dress are preventing Somali women from fulfilling their economic and political potential.

During its brief time in power, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) forbade women from leaving the house without a male relative and laid down a strict dress code for women. Although not enforced directly by the short-lived government, the dress code was cast as an individual religious obligation, and thus the way was paved for women to be targeted on an individual basis for flouting religious rules of propriety. In an environment rife with insecurity and gender-based violence, many Somali women still choose to comply with this dress code in order to minimize the danger to themselves. But while this may protect them from physical violence, it also makes them less able to do physical labor requiring freedom of movement—the kind of work available in agriculture, slaughterhouses and fisheries, where women had been employed in large numbers.

Ideologically as well, the ICU supported a strict division of gender roles, with the men responsible for supporting the family economically and the women for supporting the family within the household. While most women in Somalia rejected this model, which fundamentally ignores women's essential economic role, some were drawn to the vision of a life in which women are freed from their double or triple burden and men live up to their role of provider and protector. While the ICU has since been toppled, its impact on women's access to power and resources has remained. The obstructions of Somali women's livelihood options that have followed from its policies infringe on women's right to work, and consequently on their right to life.

³⁸ A government official from Garowe gave this as the projected result of a serious stock-taking of Somali household economy.

Within Somali society, the image of women as victims who need protection and homemakers who depend on male breadwinners has helped to entrench male dominance, undermining women's participation in peace-building initiatives and adding legitimacy to men's control of women through various means, including violence. The resulting male dominance of reconciliation and justice systems has created a culture of impunity for perpetrators, with violence treated largely as a private matter to be addressed within the family and marriage between rapist and victim considered just compensation for rape.

Among international partners, the prevailing tendency is to put aside these social problems, at least for the moment, and focus instead on the apparently more urgent questions of state-building, national institutions, aid coordination, etc. Women's empowerment, participation and livelihoods have, in practical if not in ideological terms, been pushed further down the agenda; there is little international investment in either supporting women breadwinners now or improving their economic status in the organized and public sectors in the long term. In so doing, however, international institutions have failed to recognize the correlation between women's involvement in the big questions of state-building and the future ability of the state not just to respond effectively to women's needs, but also to function in the best interests of all its citizens. Women are not only the foundation, economic as much as social and cultural, upon which Somali households are built; they are also essential to the creation of a stable, secure and responsive state, to good governance and sustainable, gender-sensitive, people-centered development.

Recommendations

1. All relevant actors should vigorously renew efforts to reach a political solution to the conflict and establish a strong central government in Somalia that includes women and women's priorities from the beginning.
2. The international community should ensure that efforts to establish and maintain peace and stability, as well as humanitarian response to the crisis, are adequately funded and responsive to women's needs.

3. National and international actors must recognize not only that women are a vital economic resource, both during and after conflict, but also that women's voices must be heard when funding decisions and national policies are made, that women must be equal partners in allocating resources, and that women must be equal beneficiaries of financial and policy decisions.

(5)

Conclusion

A major issue of concern with regard to refugees in the Arab world is that of the 21 member states of the Arab League,³⁹ only nine are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Optional Protocol; Jordan and Lebanon are not among them. Only two, Libya and Tunisia, are party to the 1954 convention on statelessness. And while five of the nine Arab League countries that are also part of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) have signed onto the 1969 OAU refugee convention, there is no similar regional instrument for the protection of refugees in the Middle East, or covering the entire Arab world. This means that international protections for refugees are applied in a haphazard patchwork that doesn't reflect refugee movements or needs. In addition, for countries that are party to refugee conventions, such as Egypt and Yemen, restrictions to key rights (such as the right to work) and lack of national legislation in line with international norms prevent refugees from accessing the services and protections to which they are entitled.⁴⁰

As all the refugee situations described above indicate, the financial resources necessary to assist and protect refugees present another serious problem for both host governments, particularly in developing countries, and UN specialized agencies. With resettlement to developed nations increasingly limited, the burden for care falls unfairly on nations with already limited economic resources and infrastructure. Support for the Iraqi refugee crisis in particular, for which the United States must take a large share of the blame, should be distributed more equitably. And, as called for by

³⁹ Although Palestine is a member of the Arab League, it is not a formally recognized state and therefore cannot be party to the conventions referred to here. It is thus not included in the total.

⁴⁰ Hughes, 36.

Security Council resolution 1325, multilateral cooperation within the UN system, both through the country team and through individual agencies with a clear mandate to protect and assist refugees (such as the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children’s Fund) is necessary to support UNHCR in addressing the needs of women and girls displaced by conflict.

Moreover, limited economic and social resources in host countries (among other factors) lead to specific difficulties for refugee women: Competition for already scarce resources and perceptions within the host community that refugees are a burden on society contribute to xenophobia and racism, and thus help to marginalize refugee communities. Protectionist measures by governments designed to protect their citizens from competition for jobs and other resources prevent refugees from becoming self-reliant and fulfilling their potential to contribute to the host community. These problems are closely related, and indeed create something of a vicious circle. And they help to prevent refugees from being able to access durable solutions and sustainable livelihoods in the host country.

Protracted refugee situations arise and endure for mainly political reasons, with blame usually shared by the country of origin and the host country: ongoing conflict or other issues that prevent voluntary return, lack of political will to address the root causes of flight, restrictions on refugee movement and employment in the host country, the refusal of the host country to support local repatriation as a durable solution, the persistent view of refugees as a burden on a host community without acknowledging or enabling their ability to contribute, and assistance that focuses on short-term solutions even in the face of long-term displacement. It should be noted that across the world, the average length of major refugee situations, protracted or not, has risen dramatically: from nine years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003.⁴¹ Assistance to refugee women, however, has not taken this shift into account and is still focused on short-term needs rather than long-term security and livelihoods—is based on emergency response rather than development models.⁴²

⁴¹ UNHCR, “Protracted Refugee Situations,” EC/54/SC/CRP.14, 10 June 2004, 2.

⁴² UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on Displaced Women, Hammamat, Tunisia, 21–24 June 2007.

Ultimately, the best long-term solutions to refugee situations are to prevent people from fleeing in the first place and to create the conditions that will enable them to return. Conflict prevention, peace-building and reconstruction must therefore be cornerstones of efforts to improve the situation for refugees across the Arab world.

(6)

General Recommendations

1. Host governments should take responsibility for status determination so that UNHCR can use its resources to fulfill its protection and assistance mandate, rather than expending its limited resources on status determination, which is not the traditional responsibility of UNHCR and not part of its mandate.
2. Donor countries and the United Nations should ensure that funding to provide protection and assistance to refugees, without discrimination to refugee women and girls and addressing their particular needs and concerns, are available through core funds rather than having to be raised through emergency appeals.
3. The United States in particular, along with other states involved in the war on and occupation of Iraq, should recognize their prime responsibility for refugees resulting from this conflict. They should increase economic and in-kind assistance to that countries of first asylum to ensure adequate protection and assistance for Iraqi women and girls.
4. UN country teams responsible for development in countries hosting large numbers of refugees should collaborate more closely with UNHCR and/or UNRWA to ensure that refugee women receive adequate long-term support without discrimination, and to avoid resentment within the host community that exacerbates tensions and blocks opportunities for local integration as a durable solution. Combined UN development and assistance programs should target both

host communities and refugees, ensuring that refugee women are represented in both planning and implementation.

5. Governments in the region, especially in countries of first asylum, should grant *prima facie* recognition for Iraqi and Sudanese refugees to remove the difficulties that arise from illegal status to prevent valuable resources from being wasted on case-by-case status determination.
6. Countries of first asylum should grant in both law and practice the right of refugee women and men to work to enable their access to secure and safe livelihoods, protect them from exploitation and abuse at hands of employers, and eliminate the conditions that cause refugee women and girls to turn to survival sex as a livelihood option.
7. Greater efforts by all parties to find political solutions to conflicts in Iraq, Sudan, Palestine and Somalia, and to funnel efforts into post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in South Sudan where peace has already laid the groundwork for reconstruction and rehabilitation, to make voluntary repatriation a viable option and a durable solution for refugees in the region.
8. All relevant actors should ensure women's participation throughout peace-building, state-building and reconstruction processes to ensure that women's priorities and concerns inform the decisions and institutions which will direct the future of the state.