



Human Rights and the Palestinian Territories

A
PARLIAMENT STREET
BRIEFING PAPER
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Briefing Paper

Introduction

Enough is enough. It's time to take off the conflict-fuelled glasses and say "no" to politically-motivated mania and no to antisemitism. We must respect the dignity, human rights of everyone – including all Palestinians – both in and *outside* of conflict. Human rights are the cornerstone of society which outline our fundamental freedoms and protections. Without the respect and protection of women's rights, LGBT rights, children's rights and basic freedoms such as freedom of belief and association: no one is safe.

As we're all aware, the abuse of women's rights across the globe, from sexual violence, economic discrimination and domestic abuse continue to plague communities worldwide. In this context, [honour-based violence](#) is no exception. Belonging to age-old patriarchal traditions which seek to control, demean and demonise a women's sense of independence, autonomy and worth, the burden of "honour" is a responsibility handed down to women and girls alone. Held accountable for the reputation of their families, in extreme cases, family members will even murder their own flesh and blood to protect their "honour".

One area of the world where honour-based violence continues to violate the rights of women and girls is the Palestinian Territories. Inside the West Bank for example, statistics on domestic violence reveal that almost [30% of ever-married women in the West Bank](#) have faced domestic violence in their own household – rising to a staggering 51% in Gaza.

In 2013, The Washington Post reported that [27 women were thought to have been killed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip](#) by family members claiming reasons of "honour" — more than double the amount of the prior 13 cases documented in the prior year. The [Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling also reported](#) a number of 27 cases of honour-based crime in 2014 and 15 in 2015 respectively.

Despite an apparent dip in cases in 2014 and a lack of data thereafter, in the same report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in Palestine, it's however

been claimed that there has been an upward trend over the last decade. In fact, [sources state](#) that in 2016, a total of 23 women died under “suspicious circumstances” (12 in the West Bank – excluding Jerusalem – and 11 in the Gaza Strip). A further 29 cases then arose in 2017 and concerned the suspected involvement of family members.

Such abuse has sadly once again reared its ugly head when on 29th August in Bethlehem, [21-year-old Israa Ghareeb was reported to have died at the hands of her family](#) in a tragic case of honour-related violence which has shocked the Arab world. Found dead in her home, Israa is believed to have suffered a stroke as a result of the ongoing injuries inflicted upon her by her family. Her “crime”? Sharing a selfie with her (soon-to-be) fiancé in public.

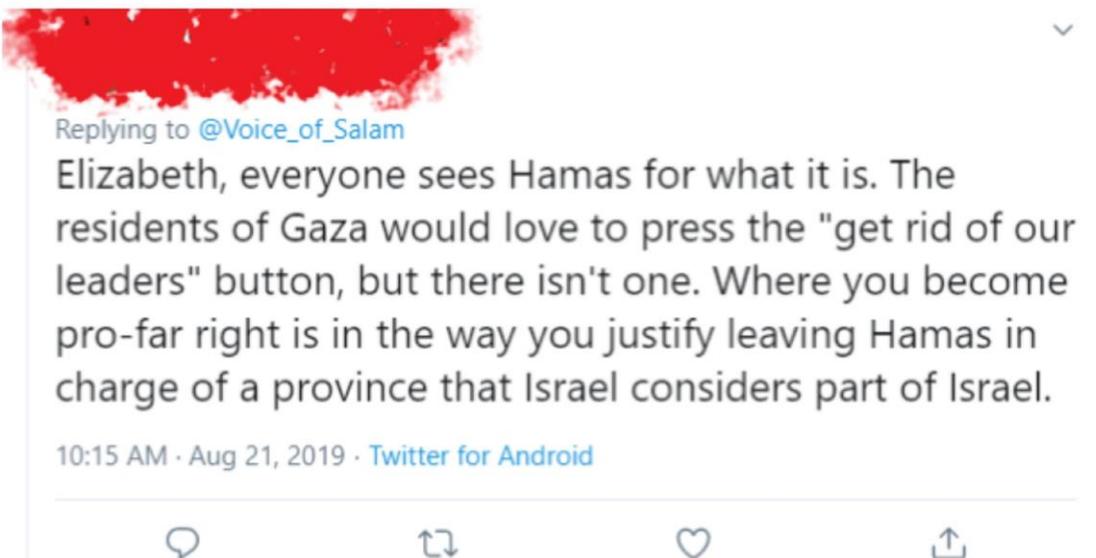
Since news of the case broke out, activists and young people from across the Arab world have taken to social media to share their anger and call out such abusive concepts of “honour”. Whilst the hashtag “*We are Israa Ghareeb*” has gone viral across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and is now being used by activists in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine to raise awareness of the reality and horrors of honour-based violence, Palestinians are also speaking out, loudly and clearly on the ground. On 4th September in Al-Bireh in the West Bank, protests took place demanding greater protection for Palestinian women. With slogans such as “Our blood is not cheap”, both men and women marched the streets sharing their great disdain for recent brutal events and calling for legal reform to safeguard women’s rights and security.

Local sources such as [ADWAR](#) – a Palestinian-based family planning and protection association – remark that the biggest issue women across Palestine face today is [the lack of legal protection](#) to protect their rights, particularly given that its current social and legal mechanisms are “still based in the discriminator Jordanian Penal Code.” ADWAR firmly believes such murders of women in Palestinian society have recently been increasing because of a lack of legal mechanisms to protect women. Following Israa’s death, the head of the governorate [Mohamed Ishtaya](#) publicly stated that: “we must strengthen the system of protecting Palestinian women.”

From “pinkwashing” to “genderwashing”?: Taking off the conflict-framed spectacles

Whilst activists across the Arab world have taken to the streets and media to share their outrage and to push for reform, the lack of (global) coverage calling on the PA to ensure greater protection of women is disappointing yet not at all surprising. Sadly, when it comes to reporting on The West Bank and Gaza, media coverage is often selective and simply conflict-laden. For whilst news of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to [circulate freely](#), there has been [near to no coverage](#) outside of the [Arabic-speaking media](#) on the recent protests in the West Bank following Israa’s death.

When activists do attempt to address internal human rights issues in Palestine, we are met with accusations and unfounded criticism. Author, Arif-Fear has personally experienced such selective outrage when daring to speak about against the Hamas regime and [rocket fire](#). She has also been “placed” on the “far-right” for suggesting that the Palestinian Authorities (PA) should be held to account for the [repression of LGBTQI+ rights by the in the West Bank](#).



Responses on Twitter when tweeting about the oppression of the LGBT community in the West Bank (August 2019).

In fact, when it comes to the issue of LGBT rights in Palestine, warnings of “[pinkwashing](#)” even by [queer Palestinians](#) themselves show how such toxic debates have formed. Evidently, when it comes to Palestine, all agency is removed from those at the centre of the issue and replaced by talk of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Amidst what is an ongoing complex conflict – which is impacting on the lives of all involved – internal social and cultural issues within The Palestinian Territories *must* be addressed. We must ask: *why are we not hearing as much about internal policies within the West Bank and Gaza? Why can we not call out the lacklustre, oppressive regimes of the PA and Hamas which fail to prioritise, protect and take responsibility for their own citizens?*

Perhaps, it's simply not in the interests of those who, for political reasons, wish to push a narrow un-nuanced view of the conflict and for [Far Left](#) activists alike – who are so steeped in their hatred of Israel that the mere “inconvenience” of such truths (as the oppression of Palestinians by their own leaders) would tear down their house of (antisemitic) cards in a second.

In the West Bank itself, alarming statements have recently been issued by the police claiming that Israa's case is “fake news” spread from Israel and the USA to ruin the image of Palestine.

Sadly, despite the evidence provided and the promise of the PA to investigate Israa's death, such reactionary irresponsible statements and attempts to shift the blame are not uncommon.

For activists and professionals concerned about human rights for all – including women's rights – they are met with frustration, disappointment and excuses. For example, Director of ADWAR, [Sahar Al Kawasmeh](#), often pushes for legal change to improve the reality of women's rights in the region, making frequent requests directly to the President. Yet, she reports that she is met with a response of: *“This is not our priority right now, our priority is Fatah, Hamas and statehood.”*

The time is now to off the “conflict-fuelled” glasses and for the PA need to start taking responsibility and prioritising their people not themselves. For when it comes to the tragic death of Israa, it's toxic patriarchal honour culture and the subsequent lack of legal protection available which we must address to eradicate honour violence. It's homophobic narratives and the government authorities which ban

LGBT+ representation and it's [Hamas and the PA](#) who are responsible for the arrest of their own citizens for wishing to exercise their critical rights to peaceful protest. It's naive, disingenuous and dangerous to centre any discussion on the region by default around the ongoing conflict. Responsibility *must* be taken. Reform *must* be created and respect *must* be sustained for the autonomy and rights of each and every Palestinian as more than tokens in an ongoing conflict. As [Mohammed from IPPF](#) (Planned Parenthood) in Hebron outlines:

“Palestine is too focused outwardly on its relations with Israel that it forgets the rights of its people and does not build a just life for citizens in the here and now.”

Just as a woman's life is seemingly worth less than her family's "honour" according to "honour-based" narratives, in the eyes of those so blinded by hatred for Israel: human rights appear to be nothing more than a pawn in such ill-informed, toxic debates on "Israel vs. Palestine". The message is loud and clear:

“We (...) live our whole life here with attention given entirely to a war whilst other problems are neglected.” ([Osama Hussein from the Excellence Centre](#) , Hebron)

Rest in peace dear Israa.

About the Authors

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