



Subject : Violence Fondée sur le Genre

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Country :

**Palestine
Syria Arab Republic**

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International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

STATEMENT: Locked Up and Forgotten, Women in Detention in Conflict-stricken Areas

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, EuroMed Rights raises deep concerns over the worsening situation of women in detention in conflict affected areas. We are particularly worried about the widespread violations of International Humanitarian Law experienced by Palestinian and Syrian women in detention.

Since September 2015, EuroMed Rights has witnessed almost twice as many Palestinian women's arrests and detention by Israeli given their participation in the recent uprising[1]. Figures show that a majority of women are being beaten and insulted during their arrest and detention[2]. Palestinian women are mainly held in prisons located outside the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). Besides being illegal according to international law, this practice hinders prisoners from accessing their lawyer and meeting their family. Indeed, families are often prohibited from visiting detainees on "security grounds". Female prisoners are also subjected to various forms of ill-treatment and psychological torture during their arrest and detention; threats, degrading body searches and sexual harassment are common practices. Most often, women are held in inappropriate prison conditions, with no consideration to their gender specific needs, including access to specific medical care.

In Syria, women are increasingly exposed to arbitrary detention as they are used as bargaining chip in hostage exchanges when negotiating with any party to the conflict. Extremist armed groups, in particular "Islamic state", have taken over large portions of the Syrian territory where they impose a social order gravely undermining the basic fundamental rights of Syrian women. Meanwhile, Syrian authorities systematically deny locking women in secret detention centers across the country. This goes against corroborated testimonies which indicate that hundreds of women remain imprisoned in appalling conditions within those secret detention centers, where torture and sexual violence are recurrent practices.

In particular, EuroMed Rights would like to stress the fate of more than 400 women and 20 children, currently detained in the women's section of "Adra" central prison in Damascus. Routinely subjected to physical abuses and solitary confinement, they are also exposed to various

forms of ill-treatment, including denial of proper food, clothing, access to basic medication, heating and electricity. Lawyers and family members have restricted access to inmates while international bodies are prevented from conducting effective monitoring of their detention conditions. Moreover, as the prison is located on the current frontline between governmental forces and opposition armed groups; female detainees are subject to serious life threats. Those women are potentially used as “human shields”. Needless to say that their families fear the prison’s attack and the danger for the women of being taken as hostage.

In light of the above, we urge the International Community to:

- Hold perpetrators of international crimes against Palestinian and Syrian women accountable in compliance with UNSCR 1325 and International Humanitarian Law
- Call for the immediate access of international monitoring mechanisms to places of detention in Syria and Palestine as well as access of humanitarian and medical aid to female prisoners
- Call on Syria to immediately cease ill-treatment of all female prisoners in every security detention center and prison across the country
- Urgently address the situation of Palestinian female prisoners and their detention conditions in political dialogue with Israel