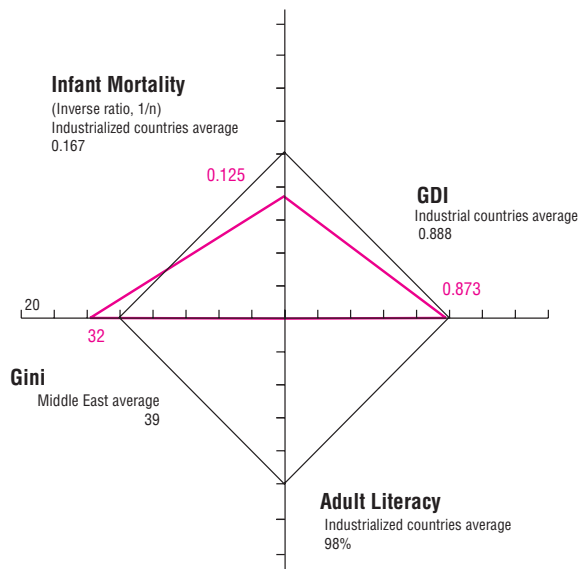


• AREEN HAWARI



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.  
Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

*The text of Israel's Declaration of Independence, which forms the essence of Israel's collective political and legal ideology, defines the State as a «Jewish and democratic state». The clear conflict between these two principles is usually resolved in laws and practices that emphasise the Jewishness of the State at the expense of democracy. This has led to a number of abuses of basic rights against*

## THE ARAB WOMEN CITIZENS: DOUBLY DISCRIMINATED

*the Palestinian society in Israel. Discrimination practised by the State against its Arab citizens reflects doubly on women, since they are also socially oppressed by their own society.*

At the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, Israel joined other nations in the commitment to work for the social development of its citizens. Similarly, in recent years **Israel has ratified a number of international human rights conventions, including the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).**

A short review of human rights issues concerning the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel raises questions about Israel's respect for these commitments. This paper considers Israel's implementation of five of the Copenhagen commitments (poverty eradication, promotion of full employment, social integration, equality and equity between women and men, universal and equitable access to quality education and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health) through the eyes of Arab women in Israel, and demonstrates that the State violates the rights of its Arab women citizens, directly and indirectly, through its silence on human rights abuses.

The latest (1995) statistics show 1,040,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel, 18.3% of the population. These are descendants of those who remained after the 1948 war and establishment of the Israeli State. Palestinian women and girls account for 572,000 of the State's citizens.<sup>1</sup>

### THE POOREST

The 1997 report of the National Insurance Institute indicates that 35.8% of Arab families live in the first (lowest) income decile

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, N° 49, (Jerusalem, 1998) Tables 2.1, 2.10 These statistics include East Jerusalem.

and 26.5% live in the second decile, whereas 1.3% of Arab families are in the ninth decile and 1.6% are in the tenth (top) income decile.<sup>2</sup> **Fully 28.3% of Arab families and 32.6% of Arab children live below the poverty line. For Jewish families and children the numbers are 16% and 21.4%.**

Women suffer greater poverty. **In 1997, 80% of Arab women of working age were unemployed**, while among the general population, the proportion of women working was 45.8%.<sup>3</sup> Many of the 20% of Arab women who worked did so in bad conditions and for very low wages. Research recently undertaken on the status of women working in the private sector in Nazareth, the largest employer of Arab women, found that 61% of women receive less than the legal minimum wage and 72% work without any legal contract.<sup>4</sup> There are also women whose work is unregistered.

**In 1995, the average income of Arab wage-earners was 68% of the average Jewish income.<sup>5</sup> The average income of women was 56.7% of men's average income. The average income of Arab women was 38.5% of the income of Jewish men.<sup>6</sup>** Arab women suffer from this reality despite the Equal Opportunities in Employment Law, which prevents discrimination in employment on the basis of gender, national belonging, beliefs, or origin.

A main cause of this situation is the lack of workplaces in Arab communities, since the State does not invest or encourage investments in Arab areas: **93% of State investments are in Jewish areas.** Thus there are very few opportunities available to women. Research undertaken on the situation of Arab women in the workplace found that 38.2% of the women surveyed indicated that they wanted to work, but could not find employment.<sup>7</sup>

Arab women face difficulties in leaving their village to work for social reasons, since society does not regard it proper for women to leave their villages for work. There are also practical difficulties, since public transport is limited or in some cases completely absent in Arab towns and villages. Arab women also suffer from inequality in facilities to take care of young children. **While 95% of Jewish three-year-olds attend kindergarten, only 44% of Arab three-year-olds do.**

## PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND CIVIL LIFE

Arab representation in Israel in elected positions is not consistent with their electoral power. In the Knesset **there are 12 Arab members out of a total of 120, and none of them are women.** There is no law or system to guarantee women's representation in elected fora.

The proportion of Arabs in senior positions in State employment is almost negligible. Arab applicants are barred by legal requirements such as requisite performance of military service, even for positions with no link to the military. Over 90% of Arab citizens do not serve in the army, nor are they required to do so.

**Of 641 managing directors of government companies, only three are Arab (less than 0.5%)<sup>8</sup> and none are Arab women;** of 1,059 directors of government companies, only 15 are Arab, again none of them are women. The proportion of Arab judges is also small: only one Arab (male) judge has ever served on the bench of the Supreme Court; only 19 Arab judges are employed by any State Court, and of them only four are women.

In 1993, the Israeli women's lobby successfully pressed for passage of a law to improve the position of women in the public sector and to secure suitable representation for women in all government companies. **Based on this law, the women's lobby took two government companies to the Supreme Court for the lack of women directors on their boards.** The Court ruled that the companies had broken the law, and at the same time broadened the principle of equality to include affirmative action. The court ruled that a suitable proportion of the board should be women. At the time of the ruling, only 2% of company board members were women. Now, women form 30% of company board members. This legal decision principally benefitted women of the higher classes, because they are the ones who have access to such jobs. **Since Arab women are generally less educated and of lower social status, the Court's ruling has had no relevance for them.**

Despite their limited resources and opportunities, local authorities remain the one place where Arabs can attain positions of power. Battles for this power are great, and they can even be bloody. Traditional values and ties are employed so that the sons of the largest families can succeed in the battle. Consequently, women are marginalised and more usually absent on local councils. Since the establishment of the State in 1948, only one woman has ever been elected as head of a local council and today there is none. Social tradition requires women to remain in the home to protect their children and serve their husbands.

## EDUCATION IS A LONG WAY AWAY

Israel has achieved the goal of full primary education; yet within the education system there remain great disparities. The 1996 State Comptroller's Report shows that the rate of dropouts in Arab schools is more than double the rate in Jewish schools: almost

<sup>2</sup> A. Farris, *Community in Distress, Limited Services*, Lobby Group Report, (Haifa, September 1998).

<sup>3</sup> *Statistical Abstract*, Table 12.7.

<sup>4</sup> Arab Association for Human Rights & A. Farris, *The Status of Arab Women Working in the Private Sector in Nazareth*, (to be published December 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Bendlik, *Wages and Income National Insurance Institute Survey 1995*, (Jerusalem, April 1998) Table 1, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* Table 5, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> A. Farris, *The Status of Arab Women in the Workplace*.

<sup>8</sup> Sikkuy – The Association for the Advancement of Equal Opportunity, *Equality and Integration*, (1997), p. 28.

40% of Arab students aged 16–17 dropped out of school, compared with 9% of Jewish 16–17 year olds.<sup>9</sup>

In a number of Arab villages unrecognised<sup>10</sup> by the State there are no schools at all, so students are compelled to travel miles to reach school, sometimes on foot. **Due to the pressures of conservatism, many families in these villages do not send their daughters to school outside the village and the dropout rate for girls is high. In 1997 only 45% of school age girls in the Negev were at school. Part of the remainder had never been.**<sup>11</sup>

There are significant differences in the pass rates in the high school matriculation (Bagrut) exams. While the general pass rate is 65.4% for Jewish students, it is only 49.2% for Arab students. For girls, the Arab pass rate is 46.6% and the Jewish pass rate is 68.2%.<sup>12</sup>

**The illiteracy rate is higher for Arab women than for any other sector of the population.** According to 1997 statistics, 11.7% of Arab women are illiterate while only 4% of the Jewish women are.<sup>13</sup> The rate of Arab women who completed only elementary school is 22.2%; this rate is 9.7% for Jewish women. By contrast, 15.2% of Jewish women continue their education beyond elementary; only 4% of Arab women do. This is in part because there is no Arab university in Israel and all the universities are far from Arab localities. Arab women also suffer from discrimination in the allocation of grants and places in student accommodation.

## THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

Statistics from 1992–96 show that the mortality rate for Arabs in Israel is 10.1 per thousand infants, while for Jewish infants it is 5.5 per thousand.<sup>14</sup> This discrepancy is not by chance: **it is the result of a consistent gap between the health services provided to the Jewish population and those provided to the Arab population.** The Ministry of Health acknowledged in 1992 the existence of a 30–40% gap between the health services for Jews and Arabs.<sup>15</sup>

The lack of health services within Arab communities compels the Arab population to travel to Jewish localities to receive medical care. For instance, a study in 1995 found that 42% of Arab women

in Israel have to leave their villages for women's health services. Arab women face social restrictions on travelling outside of their villages. They also have language problems since most health officers are Jewish and most information brochures are in Hebrew. As a consequence, Arab women suffer from a lack of awareness of the health services available. In particular, Arab women have limited access to family planning services and birth control. Correspondingly, the fertility rate among Arab women is 4.3, while for Jewish women it is 2.6.<sup>16</sup> This is compounded by the lack of health education programmes: 93% of Arab schools do not offer any health education classes.

The health conditions in the unrecognised villages are the worst in Israel. For example, the infant mortality rate for the Bedouin in the Negev is 23 per thousand. Health services are basic and limited, and they are provided mainly by NGOs. One-third of Bedouin women do not receive mother and child services, and the majority who do have to travel far to receive them.

## VIOLENCE

At Copenhagen, Israel committed to fostering a society that is stable, safe and just based on *inter alia* solidarity and security. In 1998, at least six Arab women were murdered in the name of what is known as family honour. Women's groups have recorded 66 cases of murder in the last seven years.<sup>17</sup> This is in addition to other abuses of women in the name of family honour such as confinement, and prevention from work, education or travel. **Statistics prove that 50% of Arab married women are beaten at least once a year; 25% are beaten at least once every six months.**<sup>18</sup>

Far fewer women come forward to report this violence. Annual reports of the two centres for the support of Arab victims of sexual abuses report that in 1997, 276 Arab women came to the centres for help as a result of sexual abuse and 179 came as a result of other forms of abuse, mostly beatings and threats on their lives.<sup>19</sup>

The murder of Arab women is an inevitable consequence of the processes of discrimination that Arab women in Israel face. **Palestinian society still justifies these actions by defining its**

<sup>9</sup> *The State Comptroller's Report*, N° 46, (1996), pp. 363–364.

<sup>10</sup> Some 60,000 Palestinian Arabs (10,000 in the North and 50,000 in the South) live in communities that are not legally recognised by the authorities. They are excluded from official plans and maps, as though they do not exist, and moreover, all structures built in these areas (houses, kindergartens etc.) are regarded as illegal buildings that can be demolished at any time. In these «unrecognised villages», all construction of any type, including houses, mosques, roads and other infrastructure, and even repairs to existing buildings is prohibited. In addition, basic essential services to these communities are withheld.

<sup>11</sup> Ron Hose & Anat Keenan & others, *Personal and Social Aspects Influencing the Education of Bedouin Girls in the Southern District*, Kay College, (Beersheva, 1997) p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, Table 22.21.

<sup>13</sup> *Statistical Abstract*, Table 22.1.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, Tables 3.8 & 3.9.

<sup>15</sup> *Status of Palestinian Women*, pp. 61–72.

<sup>16</sup> *Statistical Abstract*, Table 3.13.

<sup>17</sup> *Statement from Al-Badil*, Al-Badil Coalition against the Crime of Family Honour, (Nazareth, Summer 1998).

<sup>18</sup> *Status of Palestinian Women*, p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> Annual Reports of Al-Siwar Movement for Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse & Women Against Violence Center to Help Victims of Sexual and Physical Abuse. These figures do not include those Arab women who came to joint Jewish–Arab centers.

**honour as dependent on women's bodies and treating family violence as an internal family issue. The authorities continue to fail to offer women sufficient protection.** In a number of cases when women went to the police, police took them back home, only to find a few days later that they had been killed.

Most women who are sexually abused keep it secret for fear of society's treatment of them, because of family threats or for personal reasons. Abused women are often blamed and find little support. Centres for rape victims say that only 20% of those raped go to the police and in most cases the charges do not reach the court. The police deal with these cases with little sensitivity or regard for the well being of the victims. In all Israel, there are only two Arab women police investigators. Most victims are questioned by local male police officers, who in many cases are known to them or the offender. This makes women uncomfortable with answering inti-

mate questions or filing complaints in full detail. Often, files are closed because of a lack of public interest, or the victim is convinced to return to her husband. Only recently have the support centres been given permission to train police to deal with Arab victims.<sup>20</sup> **State support for these centres is almost negligible. In 1997 the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour contributed just 10% of one centre's budget.**<sup>21</sup>

- Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA), Women's Human Rights Programme

<sup>20</sup> *Status of Palestinian Women*, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rahiq Rinawi, Fundraiser, Al-Siwar Movement.