

Al-Haq Comments on CEDAW Addendum regarding Women in Conflict

Date: 9 December 2025

Paragraph 3 – “Over the past 25 years, international law has significantly deepened its understanding of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) from historically stereotype-based definitions of protection to broader, survivor-informed understandings (...) conflict-related gender violence is no longer confined to acts purely sexual in nature”

It is critically important that the Addendum further stresses the need to adopt a comprehensive understanding of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence that pays due regard to intersecting factors such as culture and religion.

Acts must be contextualised to ensure they are approached coherently and in a holistic manner. Gender-based crimes specifically require context-specific factors to be taken into account. In its Policy on Gender-Based Crimes, the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) at the International Criminal Court (ICC) emphasised the need to contextualise crimes and understand the survivor’s point of view.¹ In addition, General Principle 7 of the Hague Principles on Sexual Violence (Hague Principles) explicitly states:

The sexual nature and the gravity of an act are determined in part by identity, ability, age, race, sex, culture, religion, historical precedents, indigeneity, and other intersecting factors. Therefore, if decision makers take steps to understand the context in which an act occurred, they will be better equipped to determine whether an act is sexual, and to assess the gravity of such acts.²

“Gender-competent analysis”, as defined by the OTP’s Policy on Gender-based Crimes, is part of the systematic, intersectional analytical process that asks what has happened, against whom, by whom, and why, in light of relevant intersecting factors such as gender, age, nationality and ethnicity. It accounts for different individuals’ relationships to structural oppression and exacerbated violence in a given context.³ In international criminal law, intersectionality describes how various aspects of a person’s identity — including religion, age, ethnicity or indigenous status — can render them particularly vulnerable to specific or overlapping systems of discrimination, oppression or violence.⁴ Hence, if decision makers take steps to understand the context in which an act occurred, they will be better equipped to determine whether an act

¹ ICC, *Office of the Prosecutor Policy on Gender-Based Crimes* (December 2023) <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023-policy-gender-en-web.pdf>>

² The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence <<https://4genderjustice.org/ftp-files/publications/The-Hague-Principles-on-Sexual-Violence.pdf>> 14

³ ICC, *Office of the Prosecutor Policy on Gender-Based Crimes* (December 2023) <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023-policy-gender-en-web.pdf>> para. 23

⁴ Ibid, para. 41

is sexual, and to assess the gravity of such acts as experiences of sexual acts and sexual violence vary among cultures.⁵

Adopting the recommended gender-competent analysis and incorporating intersectionality into assessments of conduct is crucial when determining what constitutes sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

As noted in the OTP's Policy on Gender-based Crimes:

The residual category of “other forms of sexual violence” (...) includes a broad range of conduct which are of comparable gravity to the other crimes in article 7(1)(g) of the [Rome] Statute. Acts of sexual nature (...) may include (...) *sexual threats ... forced nudity* in part or whole, inspecting someone's sexual body parts, and/or their *filming of these acts* and their dissemination (...) in some contexts, *forced removal of a veil* may be experienced as “forced nudity” and may qualify as a form of sexual violence (...) depending on the context of a society (for instance, when committed against members of an indigenous community), the harms may be felt at an individual and collective level.⁶

This is supported by the Hague Principles, which clarify that “[s]exual body parts vary across societies, cultures, religions, and other factors” and in certain cultures may be construed broadly to include the back, especially the lower back, buttocks, ears, hair, hips, lips, mouth, neck, thighs, waist, and wrists.⁷

Specific forms of SGBV and CRSV in Palestine

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (the Commission), in its landmark March 2025 report ‘More than a human can bear’,⁸ rightfully considered acts of sexual violence within the context in which they were carried out. It noted that acts of forced nudity and removal of veils in public and in front of the community has a particular negative impact on women living in a society with strict religious and cultural dress codes.⁹ A woman working with an organisation providing psychosocial support to women in the Gaza Strip described to the Commission how this affected women's psychological wellbeing:

With regards to ISF orders to remove veils, the women's choice is between shame and abuse, possibly death. Being forced to remove your veil has a deep psychological

⁵ See The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence <<https://4genderjustice.org/ftp-files/publications/The-Hague-Principles-on-Sexual-Violence.pdf>> 25

⁶ ICC, *Office of the Prosecutor Policy on Gender-Based Crimes* (December 2023) <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023-policy-gender-en-web.pdf>> para. 62 (emphasis added)

⁷ The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence <<https://4genderjustice.org/ftp-files/publications/The-Hague-Principles-on-Sexual-Violence.pdf>> 30

⁸ A/HRC/58/CRP.6

⁹ Ibid, para. 182

impact on women, the trauma compounded by loss and grief from a war unlike anything they have seen before.¹⁰

The attack on a woman's dignity is of such gravity that in some cases, male victims reported the stripping of female relatives as a means to humiliate Palestinian men.¹¹

There are widespread accounts of forced nudity, removal of the veil and sexual abuse and harassment by the IOF, revealing the urgent need to further prioritise a gender-competent intersectional approach to CRSV. The existence of a systematic policy of humiliation, SGBV, verbal threats and insults, and psychological torture of Palestinian women and girls,¹² is outlined by the Commission and testimonies documented by Al-Haq.

N.I.A.S., a 57 year old women released from an Israeli prison, recounted to Al-Haq:

They arrested me and stripped me completely—naked, just as God created me. I said to her, “Please, have some decency.” I told her, “This is wrong.” She said, “No, it’s not. Take it off. Take it off.” So I took everything off. Once I got dressed again, they took me to another room. In the second room, someone told me, “We need to know about your hair. We’re going to photograph you.” I said to him, “Kill me. Just shoot me.” I looked at his desk—his pistol was beside him—and I told him, “Shoot me and dump me outside. We’ve spent our whole lives defending honour and land. But my hair? Never.”

He said, “Shut up!” I told him, “Don’t shout at me. I won’t raise anything off my hair.” He kept telling me to uncover it. Then someone from the other office came in and said, “What’s going on here?” I said, “I don’t want to show my hair.” He told him, “Just take the photo.” Then the officer said, “Alright, listen. I’ll step out and have the female soldiers photograph you.” I asked, “And where will you be? And where will my photo go?” He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “No.” Still, he told the other to take the photo. Then he said, “Smile.” I said, “Smile for what?” He said, “Smile, you daughter of a whore. Smile.” I said, “I won’t smile.” That photo is still in the file.¹³

She was stripped three times, and despite being subjected to torture and inhumane conditions, this was the most distressing part for N.I.A.S.:

That’s what still haunts me. When I remember it, I hit my head—I keep banging on my head. I’m an older woman, and they had me stripped in front of all the girls—girls sitting there watching me.¹⁴

Another woman, G.H.A.A.K was stripped searched inside a mosque — a holy place of respect and worship — and recalled one of the women being arrested with her:

¹⁰ Ibid, para. 108

¹¹ Ibid

¹² See Ibid paras. 111, 113, 125, 145

¹³ Al-Haq Affidavit No. GZ118

¹⁴ Ibid

[P]oor thing — they took her out of the jeep wearing nothing but her prayer gown. Just her prayer clothes. She was saying, “Please, sisters, cover me up — I’m in the car, in the jeep, with nothing but this.” I told her, “Please, someone cover her, cover her — they took me out like this too, just in my prayer clothes.” What can you say about what they did? These aren’t normal actions. Nothing like this has ever happened to us before. Ever.¹⁵

She proceeded to reveal that in Israeli prison:

They made us take off our clothes and searched all of us. That’s how the searches were. Once or twice, yes — but honestly, every time we went up or down, they would search us. There wasn’t a time they didn’t search us — twenty times, they’d search us. They’d even come in the middle of the night — they’d come to us at midnight.¹⁶

While detained, she heard from Palestinian detainees stating:

“They stripped us — the Israeli women stripped us and placed us in front of the young men from Gaza.” And what did those young men from Gaza do? They took off their own clothes to cover the girls. So the Israelis beat them mercilessly — they beat them until they couldn’t take it anymore — because they dared to cover the girls from Gaza.¹⁷

N.N.H.H. said to Al-Haq that as she was being strip-searched — like N.I.A.S., this is the treatment that affected her most and a standard practice against Palestinian women when detained by the IOF¹⁸ — there was a “large sensor or flashing device”.¹⁹ Subsequently, she noted how Israeli soldiers would stand there watching and filming the women. As outlined by the Commission:

[T]he specific social and normative context in which these acts have been committed includes strong cultural and religious sensitivities linked to privacy, nudity and the significance of the veil, where stigma and social exclusion can have deep repercussions at the individual and community level for the victim.²⁰

This is compounded by any videos or photographs taken due to the risk of their dissemination, which makes the victim’s humiliation indefinite and irremediable.

Adopting a gender-competent, intersectional analysis also reveals less obvious, but equally problematic forms of GBV. Israel has fragmented the Palestinian people on both sides of the Green Line maintaining a settler colonial apartheid regime to subjugate the Palestinian people. In areas of the occupied West Bank, such as the South Hebron Hills and the Jordan Valley, Palestinian women are primarily responsible for livestock, including meat and dairy production

¹⁵ Al-Haq Affidavit No. GZ117

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ See Al-Haq Affidavits No. GZ043 & GZ053.1

¹⁹ Al-Haq Affidavit No. GZ053.1

²⁰ A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 184

for domestic use.²¹ Israel's discriminatory practice of home demolitions,²² to expand its settler colonisation of Palestinian territory, along with its destruction of the agricultural structures used by women for food production and animal husbandry, have a clear gendered impact on women which are stripped of all necessary facilities to feed and support the family.²³ Traditionally, women are responsible for managing water usage, yet demolitions make it virtually impossible to maintain a sanitary environment, particularly considering the specific needs of women and girls. The general lack of access to private facilities and menstrual products in the aftermath of home demolitions makes women and girls particularly vulnerable to poor hygiene and potentially detrimental health risks due to negative interim practices as they attempt to support and care for their family. One woman who spoke to Al-Haq recalled using pieces of sponge retrieved from destroyed mattresses as a replacement for sanitary pads, which were unavailable for days following the demolition.²⁴ This assault on a woman's dignity, as well as right to health, is further exacerbated by Israel's weaponisation of water as a tool of forcible transfer.²⁵

Paragraph 5 – “AI-enabled decision-making can transform conflict and warfare tactics”

Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza has shown that artificial intelligence-enabled decision-support systems (AI-DSS) has already transformed conflict.²⁶ This is not a problem of the future, nor should it be phrased as a potentiality.

Israel's military has lauded AI as a “game changer” for generating targets more swiftly.²⁷ The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) first deployed AI systems to generate and prioritise lethal targets at scale during its 11-day bombardment of Gaza in May 2021, which it publicly described as its first “AI war”.²⁸ Since then, the IOF have significantly expanded their reliance

²¹ Al-Haq, *Adaptation Under Occupation* (2019)

<https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2021/07/15/climatechange2019-1626328773.pdf> p. 31

²² Since 1967, the IOF has routinely demolished Palestinian homes in the OPT. However, since the second intifada began in September 2000, the practice of home demolitions, forced expulsion and land seizures has increased dramatically. Post Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, rates of home demolitions have reached unprecedented levels. See UN OCHA, ‘West Bank Monthly Snapshot - Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement | July 2025’ (22 August 2025) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-monthly-snapshot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-july-2025>>

²³ Al-Haq, *Unpacking Gender in Coercive Environments: The Case of the Jordan Valley* (2017)

<https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/alhaq_files/publications/UnpackingGenderinCoerciveEnvironmentsTheCaseoftheJordanValley.pdf> p.12

²⁴ Ibid, p.13

²⁵ See ibid & *Adaptation Under Occupation* (2019)

²⁶ See Al-Haq, *Artificial Intelligence, Cultural Rights, and the Right to Development*

<https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2025/12/01/ah-input-ai-development-final-1764605926.pdf>

²⁷ Sam Mednick, Garance Burke and Michael Biesecker, ‘How US tech giants supplied Israel with AI models, raising questions about tech's role in warfare’ (AP News, 18 February 2025) <<https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-ai-weapons-430f6f15aab420806163558732726ad9>>

²⁸ The Jerusalem Post, ‘Israel's operation against Hamas was the world's first AI war’ (27 May 2021) <<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/gaza-news/guardian-of-the-walls-the-first-ai-war-669371>>

on AI-enabled tools, using cloud computing and machine-learning systems to ingest and process vast volumes of surveillance data in order to automate its ongoing Nakba.

The Gospel' ('Habsora' in Hebrew), an AI platform generates targets at a rate previously impossible. From the moment the machine was activated in 2021, it generated 100 new targets per day — a staggering figure in comparison to the prior ability to create 50 targets per year.²⁹ 'The Gospel' plays a key role in generating “power targets” which include high-rises and residential towers in the heart of cities and public buildings such as universities, banks, and government offices. The idea behind hitting such targets is that a deliberate attack on Palestinian society will exert “civil pressure” on Hamas.³⁰ Additional automated tools such as Where's Daddy? are used to track alleged militants and trigger bombings once they returned to their family homes.

The devastating impact of AI-DSS in Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza is now both well-documented and widely recognised. The UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reported that it was “extremely concerned about the use by the Israeli military of [AI] and surveillance technologies, which proved to be key contributing factors in the horrifying number of civilian casualties”.³¹ Airwars, a watchdog which tracks, assesses, archives and investigates civilian harm claims in conflicts, reported:

By almost every metric, the harm to civilians from the first month of the Israeli campaign in Gaza is incomparable with any 21st-century air campaign.³²

This includes the gendered impact of the genocide. Previous investigative mechanisms of the Human Rights Council have noted the disproportionate impact on women of heavy explosives in populated areas, where, due to socially prescribed gender roles, they are responsible for the home environment and care of family members.³³

Women and children account for nearly half of the Palestinian death toll in Gaza.³⁴ During the first month of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, more than nine out of ten women and children killed were in residential buildings, and 95 percent of women were killed together with at least one child.³⁵ After two years of Israel's genocidal campaign, a staggering 92 percent

²⁹ Yuval Abraham, “A mass assassination factory’: Inside Israel’s calculated bombing of Gaza’ (+972 Magazine, 30 November 2023) <<https://www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-gaza/>>

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ A/80/365, p.9

³² Airwars, *Patterns of harm analysis - Gaza, October 2023* <<https://gaza-patterns-harm.airwars.org/assets/Airwars%20Patterns%20of%20harm%20analysis%20-%20Gaza%20October%202023.pdf>>

³³ A/HRC/29/CRP.4, para. 527

³⁴ UN OCHA, ‘Reported impact snapshot | Gaza Strip (3 December 2025)’ (4 December 2025) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-3-december-2025>>

³⁵ A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 28

of Gaza’s residential buildings have been damaged or destroyed through intentional targeting.³⁶ The Commission has concluded that the IOF intentionally directed its attacks on civilian residential areas and civilian property with knowledge of women and children casualties, who are also targeted collectively on the basis that Israel considers the civilian population as a whole to be associated with Palestinian armed groups.³⁷ This has led to the “high and increasing number and proportion of female fatalities in Gaza, which is on an unprecedented scale”.³⁸

Need for Corporate Responsibility

With AI already having transformed warfare, it is crucial for the Addendum to stress the role of corporations in SGBV and CRSV linked to AI-DSS. Beneath the visible destruction in Gaza lie servers, networks, and software systems designed, trained and maintained by some of the world’s most powerful technology corporations. Israel’s use of AI in Gaza, fed by mass digital surveillance, has reshaped debates on accountability and exposed grave gaps in existing governance frameworks that regulate the conduct of corporate and private actors in armed conflict, including situations of unlawful occupation.³⁹

Israel’s genocide against the Palestinian people marks the first instance of the direct use of commercial AI models produced by United States (US) technology companies in live combat. Under ‘Project Nimbus’, a 1.2 billion USD contract, Google and Amazon provide the Israeli government and military with advanced cloud infrastructure and machine-learning capabilities.⁴⁰ Microsoft has maintained an especially close, decades-long relationship with the Israeli military. That relationship, alongside those with other major firms, intensified after 7 October 2023 due to Israel’s subsequent mass surveillance (to feed AI-DSS such as ‘The Gospel’) straining its own computing infrastructure and increasing its reliance on external cloud providers. By March 2024, the military’s use of Microsoft, as well as OpenAI, AI services had risen to nearly 200 times the levels recorded before the week leading up to Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, with the volume of data stored on Microsoft servers more than doubling to over 13.6 petabytes — roughly 350 times the digital memory required to store every book in the US Library of Congress.⁴¹

³⁶ UN News, ‘Gaza: Destruction of vital lifting gear halts search for thousands buried under rubble’ (22 April 2025) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162491>>

³⁷ Ibid, para. 165

³⁸ Ibid para. 213

³⁹ Marwa Fatafta, ‘AI for War: Big Tech Empowering Israel’s Crimes and Occupation’ (Al-Shabaka, 26 October, 2025) <<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/ai-for-war-big-tech-empowering-israels-crimes-and-occupation/#resource-summary>>

⁴⁰ Marwa Fatafta, ‘AI for War: Big Tech Empowering Israel’s Crimes and Occupation’ (Al-Shabaka, 26 October, 2025) <<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/ai-for-war-big-tech-empowering-israels-crimes-and-occupation/#resource-summary>>

⁴¹ Ibid

OpenAI has now revised its terms of use, moving from a blanket prohibition on military use to permitting “national security use cases that align with our mission”.⁴² Google amended its public AI ethics policy to remove language stating it would not use its AI for weapons and surveillance, instead emphasising AI that supports national security.⁴³ Shortly thereafter, in March 2024, Google deepened its ties with the Israeli Ministry of Defense (IMOD) by signing a new contract to develop its cloud infrastructure.⁴⁴ Israel has also deepened its collaboration with Palantir, one of the world’s most advanced data-mining companies, with longstanding ties to the US Central Intelligence Agency. Palantir has supplied the Israeli military and intelligence agencies with sophisticated targeting and analytics capabilities, and both sides have publicly affirmed their shared commitment to harnessing Palantir’s technology in support of war-related missions.⁴⁵

These developments have enormous implications for the role of the technology sector in enabling unethical and unlawful warfare. The rapid growth of AI militarisation is taking place in a legal vacuum. Recent national and international initiatives on AI governance, frequently framed around the protection of privacy and human rights, largely fail to address the grave consequences of AI deployment in armed conflict and their gendered impact. Concurrently, non-binding standards and soft-law instruments are routinely disregarded. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which articulate both State duties and corporate responsibilities to identify, prevent and mitigate human rights harms, are habitually ignored by technology companies. This is notwithstanding the UNGPs requiring that companies operating in conflict-affected areas must treat the risk of contributing to gross human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law as a matter of legal compliance. In practice, technology firms continue to apply these obligations selectively, if at all.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Billy Perrigo, ‘Exclusive: Google Contract Shows Deal With Israel Defense Ministry’ (Time, 12 April 2024) <<https://time.com/6966102/google-contract-israel-defense-ministry-gaza-war/>>

⁴⁵ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, ‘Palantir allegedly enables Israel’s AI targeting in Gaza, raising concerns over war crimes’ (12 April 2024) <<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/palantir-allegedly-enables-israels-ai-targeting-amid-israels-war-in-gaza-raising-concerns-over-war-crimes/#:~:text=Palantir%20allegedly%20enables%20Israel's%20AI,Business%20&%20Human%20Rights%20Resource%20Centre>>

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