

NOREF Report

The civil defence-civilian protection nexus in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

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Executive summary

This report investigates the civil defence-civilian protection interface in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Findings show that international support to Palestinian civilians' safety is divided along the lines of civilian protection and civil defence. There are also striking differences between the Gaza administration's and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) approach to the interface of civilian protection and civil defence. The former has an explicitly gendered view and integrates internal and external threats to safety. At present, the PA is committed to the Hyogo Framework of Action and its approach reflects the international aid policy approach. However, gendered examples suggest that the cultural value basis of civil defence is not very different

in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Interviews with officials from West Bank municipalities show varying levels of awareness of civil defence law and national strategy, and variations in municipalities' existing civil defence practices in the West Bank. Existing plans and policy documents focus on natural hazards and appear to be gender blind, which, in the light of past experiences in the OPT and elsewhere, may increase violence against women in emergency situations. The report concludes that the encouragement of community-based emergency preparedness by the PA and the international community reflects the privatisation of important segments of safety and protection to families and households.

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Introduction

The notion of civilian protection is based on the legal distinction between civilians and combatants as a core principle of humanitarian protection. This distinction appears in the earliest texts of the laws of war and is expanded upon in Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions of 1977,¹ which holds that “the civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against dangers arising from military operations”.² Civilian protection issues in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are consequently often discussed in humanitarian overviews³ and snapshots⁴ that report events on the ground from the perspective of international human rights law,⁵ with a focus on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Israeli military occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Population protection as part of internal security in non-warring countries is usually called “civil defence” or “civil protection”. Compared to “civilian protection”, the concept of “civil defence” is a more generic term, particularly after the cold war. It refers to prevention, mitigation, preparation, emergency evacuation, and recovery in the event of both natural and human-made catastrophes and crises. A country’s civil defence system can be based on a combination of the state’s population protection functions and volunteerism or on volunteers’ activities alone.

As much as the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict overshadows and forges Palestinian civilians’ safety and protection, in view of the statehood bid of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the PA’s duties towards the Palestinian population as outlined in the so-called Oslo Accords and later (e.g. in national development plans and laws issued by the PA), this report argues that civilian protection in the OPT should be looked at from a perspective that integrates civilian protection and civil defence.

Because a legally anomalous situation prevails in the OPT, civilian protection should be understood as encompassing dimensions of population protection that are part of the state’s functions in a context of reasonably well-functioning central governance, as is the case in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Moreover, an international policy approach to Palestinian civil defence should integrate aspects of civilian protection in order to fulfil its operational goals and the overall strategic goal of aid to the Palestinian people. Major donors such as the European Union (EU) and Norway attempt to merge the Millennium Development Goals with conflict sensitivity⁶ to facilitate peacebuilding and, ultimately, resolve the conflict. Thus, this report approaches civilian protection in the Palestinian areas through the emerging practices of civil defence.⁷

Civil defence covers a vast area, from fire brigades to population shelters, as well as mitigation and evacuation in the event of earthquakes, floods and landslides. In the larger framework of security, its basic functions belong to the realm of internal security in the Palestinian state-to-be. However, the ongoing Israeli occupation and the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict make the Palestinian context special: “human-made catastrophes” and “human-made crises” refer primarily to the conflict, thus blurring the line between “civilian protection” and “civil defence”. This intertwining was illustrated by a Palestinian Ministry of the Interior (MoI) security adviser, who pointed out that the fire brigades operated by the Palestinian Civil Defence (PCD) are expected to extinguish fires that result from Israeli missile attacks.⁸ Indeed, PCD functions such as fire brigades and ambulances cater to the civilian population whether the emergency is caused by natural hazards or conflict hostilities.

Evidence suggests that natural-disaster-prone areas in the global South tend to be conflict prone and that environmental hazards are often

1 Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of August 12th 1949; Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions of August 12th 1949, Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts (AP II), Article 12(2), cf. PHPC (2007: 4).

2 AP II, Article 51(1)(2), cf. PHPC (2007: 4).

3 See, among others, OCHA OPT (2012).

4 Such as OCHA OPT’s *Civilian Protection Weekly*.

5 See, among others, PHPC (2007); Stork (n.d.). See also UNHRC (2009); Falk (2010).

6 Also, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights are parts of the Western consensus on the conditions of development co-operation.

7 It is not possible to include all aspects of this interface in the scope of the present text. Therefore the Palestinian civil police and the role of the EU Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS), which has a central supporting function in training and building the capacity of the Palestinian police, fall outside the scope of the present discussion.

8 Interview with MoI official, Ramallah, June 7th 2011.

followed by civil unrest. Like the consequences of human-made crises, the consequences of natural hazards in the global South tend to be highly gendered. Disaster risk assessments are therefore not only linked to biophysical settings, but also to socioeconomic conditions such as legislation, capacity, institutional structure, and economic and social variables.

Methodology

The author investigated the civil defence-civilian protection interface in the OPT through the practices of the PCD by way of a questionnaire and interviews; a review of policy documents, plans and other relevant written sources; and an analysis of ethnographic data. The backdrop of the present discussion is the author's anthropological research on security, safety and protection among Palestinians.

Legal framework

The legal foundation for the PCD is the Palestinian Civil Defence Law No. 3 of 1998, which mandates the PCD to manage "all acts of civil defence". It also mandates the Higher Council of Civil Defence (HCCD) and local civil defence councils in each district to act on civil defence measures.

In addition to defining the scope of civil defence, the law requires the PCD to report to the MoI and mandates its organisational structure and main tasks. Further, it specifies which actions the PCD needs to take in order to fulfil the requirements of the law and defines the composition of the HCCD (comprising representatives of relevant ministries and key security institutions), which is the main overseeing body of the PCD.

The law also regulates when and how often the HCCD meets, and defines its responsibilities, including how to establish a civil defence committee in each governorate. Furthermore, it defines the governorate committees' main tasks and responsibilities and the role of the MoI in relation to these committees, as well as the latter's relation to local councils (city or municipal councils). The law also defines the authority of the staff of these various organisations and lays

down regulations for medical doctors. Finally, it delineates the responsibilities of the MoI in emergency cases and codifies the penalties for violators of this law.⁹ The law also sets the division of the costs of emergency preparation and prevention activities. Article 21 lays down the need and requirements for shelters.

The duties and responsibilities of the HCCD include:

- developing emergency plans and specifying the duties of public and private parties in terms of these plans;
- developing protection plans against chemical, radioactive, and bacterial contamination and toxic gases;
- issuing the directives required to organise the HCCD's duties, and managing its operation rooms and the operation rooms of civil defence committees in the governorates and provinces;
- establishing and equipping public shelters and providing for the storage of the equipment and tools required for civil defence;
- training civilians on first aid, evacuation and other activities, and specifying governorate committees' duties and tasks;
- finding volunteer groups for emergency support;
- raising the alarm to citizens should a crisis arise; and
- developing financial estimates for the emergency and disaster budget, and submitting it to the cabinet for inclusion in the public budget.

Although the law covers a wide spectrum of emergency preparedness issues, the PCD's legal basis remains problematic because all the various aspects of the law have not been followed by relevant regulations and rulings applying to its implementation. Moreover, the tasks and requirements mandated in the law are in different stages of fulfilment at the practical and operational level, as will be discussed below.

It is important to note that in principle the 1998 law also binds the Gaza Strip.

⁹ The law can be found on the PCD website, <<http://pcd.ps/ar/showpage.php?id=23>> (accessed November 1st 2012).

The PCD: towards a culture of emergency preparedness

“We hope that the Israelis will co-operate with us for better preparedness in the field of disaster management. As you know, when a disaster strikes, there are no borders, no visas.”

Director-general, Department of Disaster Risk Reduction, PCD

The OPT is highly vulnerable to natural hazards, mainly earthquakes, landslides, droughts and desertification (Al-Dabbeek, 2008: 18). According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) disaster risk reduction (DRR) assessment, a major destructive earthquake is expected sometime in the near future and will cause extensive damage and losses, among other things as a direct result of the extreme vulnerability of buildings (Al-Dabbeek, 2008: 19).

The expected natural catastrophes and crises will take place in an environment of severe restrictions on mobility, the relative isolation of many Palestinian villages from nearby cities, and a lack of sufficient co-ordination between the PA and the occupying power. The separation wall has further isolated numerous communities and made them inaccessible to the PCD. Furthermore, when asked about the most probable human-made risk scenario, interviewees in municipalities and the PCD pointed to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For example, over the past ten years Nablus and Ramallah have experienced missile attacks, invasions, sieges and curfews that pose serious challenges to fire fighting, water and food security, and access to medical care.

At present the PA is committed to the Hyogo Framework for Action. While looking forward to having its own strategy for DRR, the PCD has adopted the priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Disaster Management Cycle, i.e. risk analysis mitigation, preparedness, impact, rescue, relief, recovery and improvement. It has submitted a report for 2009-11 and an interim report for 2011-13, which shows the progress in implementing the Hyogo Framework. Regionally, the PA considers the Arab Strategy for DRR as a reference point and has close relation with

Jordanian Civil Defence. It has also recently signed a bilateral agreement with Tunisian Civil Defence.

Moreover, the PA is a partner of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument-funded Prevention Preparedness Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters (PPRD) South Programme as part of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy.

As stated above, Palestinian civil defence functions through the PCD, which is a governmental organisation under the Mol. The most important non-governmental civil defence actor is the Palestinian Red Crescent. The PCD operates from a head office in Ramallah and has 11 directorates in the West Bank. Each directorate manages between three and five fire centres, whose main role is to respond to fires and traffic accidents. In addition, the head office manages a support unit. Currently there are 863 staff members, but the goal is to have 2,400 staff members. To meet the gap, volunteers are being trained.¹⁰

As part of awareness-raising the Palestinian Red Crescent, in co-ordination with the PCD, has recently produced a Household Emergency Plan that is being distributed through mosques, community-based organisations and universities. This leaflet instructs households on how to prepare a box of necessities that should be readily available in an emergency situation; draw up a communication plan linking household members; and prepare an evacuation plan and a plan for those family members who need to stay at home. It instructs people about various matters (i.e. alarm systems, broadcasting, care of the elderly and the disabled, and care of animals) and discusses disaster scenarios that might affect family members and what to include in the abovementioned emergency box (i.e. blankets; masks to protect the face from soil; important documents such as IDs, and birth and marriage certificates; financial documents; important photographs; etc.).

¹⁰ Interviews with director-general of the DRR Department, PCD, October 24th and October 30th 2012. See also Thorvaldsdottir (2011).

The plan also gives advice on what necessities should be stored in each household: a radio and batteries, a headset, water (3 litres/person/day plus water for cleaning and cooking), food for at least three days, a first aid kit, diapers and milk substitute for infants, clothes, sturdy shoes, hats, towels and toothbrushes. The plan also provides instructions on how to store water and how often batteries and stored food expiration dates should be checked.

Awareness of the Civil Defence Law's implications and ongoing efforts varies considerably among relevant Mol and PCD staff members. This reflects the fact that the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict blurs the lines between internal/external and security/protection needs and priorities. For example, the PCD website describes the context of the emergency preparedness measures by defining Palestinian areas as "war zones" and "permanent war areas" where civilians are "most vulnerable" and "at risk".¹¹ A high-ranking security adviser in the Mol – the key ministry for internal security, including civil defence – defined the conflict as the most important and acute security threat for the Palestinians,¹² whereas international organisations' risk assessments and project plans focus mainly on technical support and capacity-building for the PCD in the event of natural disasters (Al-Dabbeek, 2008; see also Thorvaldsdottir, 2011; OCHA et al., 2012; WFP OPT, 2012). When asked about population shelters, the security adviser sarcastically contrasted Israeli and Palestinian preparedness in terms of cultural differences: "the Israelis dig holes in the ground to cover themselves, but that is not the culture of the Palestinians, who want to see the sun". To a question on whether an emergency plan exists for Ramallah, he confirmed its existence, but from the vantage point of November 2012, this study discovered that such a plan does not yet exist.¹³

Moreover, an interview with the director-general of the DRR Department indicated a lack of awareness of the abovementioned Household Emergency Plan. Indeed, the Palestinian Red Crescent is the main organisation responsible for

writing and distributing the plan. Later the director-general clarified that "this brochure is prepared by a Civil Defence official body concerning DRR to raise community awareness in this area; the Palestinian Red Crescent supports the Civil Defence Corps and is not a substitute for it", thus emphasising co-ordination and complementarity between governmental and non-governmental actors.

Relative co-ordination gaps raise several issues. Ostensibly, DRR has numerous dimensions that are delegated to different actors in each country. However, co-ordination gaps can be rectified and represent the least of the PA's challenges in ensuring the safety to the population. More importantly, co-ordination gaps indicate that the facts on the ground are such that, unlike NGOs, the PCD is unable to reach all Palestinian households. As the director-general of the PCD DRR Department stated, there are 22 civil defence centres in Area B, "which is not enough according to international standards and given the complexity of the Palestinian situation". The complexity referred to points to the fact that Area B is jointly controlled by the PA and Israel. However, in Israeli-controlled Area C PCD centres are prohibited, although the PCD is expected to provide services to inhabitants. Finally, there are no centres in refugee camps, although the Civil Defence Law explicitly mandates the PCD to function in such camps.¹⁴

Furthermore, knowledge gaps reflect priorities and experience-based risk scenarios, as well as different security understandings. Security advisers tend to perceive security in military-driven, armed-violence-based terms, whereas civil defence is more readily linked to human security, although it is implicitly state centred.

The differences between the Gaza administration's approach and that of the PA to the interface of civilian protection and civil defence are striking.

¹⁴ For example, according to residents of Balata and Safat refugee camps, the civil police have limited access, which may hinder or seriously delay crime investigations. Because Safat is located in the Jerusalem municipal area, access by Palestinian civil police must be co-ordinated with the Israeli authorities and therefore their involvement in crime solving is extremely rare and happens usually when an involved party is a West Bank resident. For the UN Relief and Works Agency's role in civilian protection in the camps, see, among others, Takkenberg (1991); Khouri (2009).

¹¹ Accessed November 1st 2012.

¹² Interview with high-ranking Mol security adviser, June 7th 2011.

¹³ Interview with head of the Projects Division, Ramallah Municipality, October 1st 2012.

In Gaza, the Mol is also the key responsible ministry for civil defence. Its website¹⁵ reveals an explicitly gendered view that combines internal and external security threats. In addition to snapshots about fire brigade and police activities, the website, for example, warns inhabitants about “human wolves” who stalk young women on the Internet and about men who hijack girls’ mobile phone numbers and then start calling them to propose meetings. Civil Defence in Gaza points out how this can endanger a girl’s reputation and even expose her to blackmail. Moreover, the Civil Defence website regularly addresses the issue of spies and collaborators, and the dangers they pose to society. In July 2012, in a statement with National Security, the Mol declared its readiness to deal with any Israeli attack on Gaza in terms of a comprehensive emergency plan and called on citizens to give right of way to ambulances and Civil Defence personnel to rescue civilians (Safa, 2012). While communicating a message to inhabitants about the possibility of a forthcoming emergency, such a statement indicates that the Hamas administration’s security actors explicitly integrate internal and external security threats.

International engagement: the UN and EU

On an operational level, the protection of the civilian population in the Palestinian areas stands at the intersection of “civilian protection” and “civil defence”. The former term refers in international humanitarian law to the protection of civilians during time of war or in zones of conflict between state actors and non-state actors, thus including civil unrest and civil war. In the Palestinian case, the international policy approach is divided between “civilian protection” and “civil defence”. This reflects the donor community’s aid practices: in spite of efforts to move towards programmatic development co-operation in the West Bank that would allow a more integrated approach, aid remains primarily humanitarian in both the West Bank and Gaza due to intertwined political reasons and the operational aid environment.

Based on the “do no harm” principle, neutrality and impartiality, humanitarian aid is principally disassociated from the political context, despite discussions about its politicisation since the 1990s. In any event, supporting civilians to protect themselves from attacks arising from conflict hostilities would inevitably expose the aid community to accusations of partiality. The policymakers’ and analysts’ perspective towards the protection of Palestinian civilians reflects this state of affairs: on the one hand, it is centred on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and human rights violations perpetrated by the conflicting parties;¹⁶ on the other hand, its approach to DRR is disassociated from the sociopolitical context and international aid actors’ approach to DRR in Palestinian areas is divided according to their interests and mandates. The EU has made the PA a partner in its European Neighbourhood Policy and supports Palestinian civil police via EUPOL COPPS. UN organisations provide capacity-building in DRR as a consortium while maintaining a humanitarian approach to civilian protection in terms of their specific mandates.

The environment for co-ordination and capacity-building in emergency preparedness between the PA and international organisations is marked by the presence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which unavoidably blurs the line between civilian protection and civil defence. However, the international counterparts do not include this overlap in their policies, but rather mirror the PCD narrative forged by external circumstances and the international aid structure: the PCD defines Palestine as a “permanent war area” and “war zone” and claims that civilians are those “most at risk” and “vulnerable”. In turn, DRR assessments (Al-Dabbeek, 2008) and recommendations (Thorvaldsdottir, 2011) and the *Delivering as One: Support to Palestinian Civil Defence* policy document by UNDP et al. (n.d.) accommodate the blurring of civilian protection and civil defence by including the “possibility of calamity” and “civil unrest” in their threat scenarios. Keeping civilian protection and civil defence apart in spite of their obvious overlap is interesting in light of the trend

¹⁵ See Department of Civil Defence (2012), accessed monthly between January and November 2012.

¹⁶ For example OCHA OPT addresses civilian protection in its *Civilian Protection Weekly* publication and OCHA OPT (2012).

towards “integrated disaster risk reduction”. This policy approach is in line with “integrated crisis management” practices that combine crisis management and development practices.

Indeed, UNDP’s DRR assessment (Al-Dabbeek, 2008: 17) points to “a strategic shift in disaster management practices toward an integrated disaster risk reduction approach by including disaster risk reduction plan in the development process of a country” and mentions that UN agencies encourage governments to integrate disaster preparedness and mitigation into their sustainable development plans. Even so, integration of this kind cannot be considered sufficiently conflict sensitive in the Palestinian case because it does not incorporate the conflict-development-DRR nexus of the present context. The UNDP policy approach to the PCD encourages community self-reliance, saying that “government should facilitate the development of community based disaster management, authorities should see NGOs as the principal enablers of community based mitigation and therefore seek their active participation” (Al-Dabbeek, 2008: 26). This is exactly what the PCD has done. While from a positive angle this recommendation indicates a hands-on approach to the relative isolation and physical separation between Areas A, B and C, its downside is that it accommodates prevailing conditions. In so doing, international support to the PCD seems to work “around the conflict” rather than “on it”, which is the aim of conflict-sensitive aid.

The PA’s most important international partners in civil defence are the EU and a coalition that consists of UNDP, the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS). At the same time these organisations’ civilian protection activities follow their respective mandates, e.g. UNDP’s civilian protection activities concentrate on early recovery, UNRWA’s on refugees, and OCHA’s on monitoring and reporting.

OCHA’s humanitarian approach to civilian protection is as unconnected to politics as possible. It defines the situation in the OPT as a “protection-based crisis, resulting from ongoing conflict and

occupation, a lack of respect for international law, a near complete absence of accountability, and a system of policies that severely undermine the ability of Palestinian communities to live normal, self-sustaining lives” (OCHA, 2012: 1). Interestingly, OCHA encourages community self-sustainability in its approach to civil defence while simultaneously seeing the impediments facing such self-sustainability. OCHA’s field teams monitor civilian protection in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the organisation,

Every effort must be made by both parties to ensure that civilians are protected from the effects of hostilities and other threats to their life, liberty and security. ... In addition, *Israel, as the occupying power, has an obligation to ensure public order and safety and to administer the territory for the benefit of the civilian population, while respecting the basic rights and existing laws* (OCHA, 2012: 12; emphasis added).

This approach to civilian protection encompasses important elements of civil defence, namely public safety and respecting the Palestinian Law for Civil Defence.

OCHA’s monitoring reveals that recent trends particularly in Gaza are further blurring the line between civil defence and civilian protection: in access-restricted areas there is a 43% increase in civilian fatalities compared to military armed force member fatalities in Gaza compared to 2010 (OCHA, 2012: 8). The same trend can be observed in terms of injuries: in 2011 civilian injuries increased by 22% and armed group member injuries decreased compared to 2010. The figures confirm the PCD’s definition of civilians as “most vulnerable” and “at risk”. Moreover, OCHA (2012: 7) notes, “no alarm or shelter system is available for the civilian population in Gaza”. Alarms and population shelters belong to the scope of DRR and their non-existence concerns both civil defence and civilian protection. Their need is emphasised by the practices of urban warfare:

storing of weaponry in, and the launching of rocket attacks from densely populated areas, is a widely reported practice among armed factions in Gaza. In addition to contravening international law, this exposes the civilian

population in Gaza to Israeli attacks targeting those sites as well as to the danger of accidental explosions (OCHA, 2012: 7).

The *Delivering as One: Support to Palestinian Civil Defence* policy document contains a set of projects to

improve the overall DRR capacities of the PCD, so as to minimize life and property losses from both slow and sudden onset disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides. This also includes the possibility of calamity as a result of civil unrest due to the continued occupation of the Palestinian territory (UNDP et al., n.d.).

By referring to “civil unrest” instead of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the partners approach civil defence as part of internal security, while implicitly acknowledging the overlap between civil defence and civilian protection.

Project activities include, among others:

- training PCD staff in the use of Geographical Information System tools and ensuring co-operation protocols among the PA, Jordan and Israel in case of major disasters (OCHA, UNDP);
- establishing a national rescue training school and urban search and rescue team, as well as awareness and educational campaigns (UNDP);
- improving the PCD’s information management and emergency communication systems and strengthening its logistical capacity, including storage solutions and disaster response supplies, and improving PCD information technology and telecommunication mechanisms (WFP);
- developing an emergency operations and command centre to provide co-ordination among the civil police, the Palestinian Red Crescent and the PCD; and
- providing information dissemination portals for schools, youth, women’s community centres and health centres (UNRWA).

The ongoing efforts by the PCD and its UN partners are laudable. However, it is hoped that a special effort will be made to engage Israel as the occupying party in the Palestinian civil defence system from the perspective of civilian

protection. The opinion climate in Israeli society towards the conflict and towards Palestinians per se hardened significantly between 2007 and 2010 (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010), which may have ramifications for how Israel would act on Palestinian civilians’ needs in catastrophes and crises, whether caused by natural or human-made factors.

As mentioned above, the PA is a partner in PPRD South as part of the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy, which “seeks to contribute to stability and good governance in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood and to promote a ring of well-governed countries to the East and South of the EU with whom the EU can enjoy close and cooperative relations” (PPRD South Programme, 2012). In return for the implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, neighbouring countries obtain, for example

intensified cooperation to prevent and face common security threats, closer dialogue in the context of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) based on shared values, strong democratic institutions and a common understanding of the need to institutionalize respect for human rights (PPRD South Programme, 2012).

PPRD South’s modus operandi draws on liberal peace theory, i.e. democracies do not go to war against each other. Interestingly, partners¹⁷ include both parties of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and three countries that host Palestine refugees. The platform might, therefore, through a de facto commitment to an integrated DRR approach, have the potential to promote increased co-ordination between the PA and Israel in terms of DRR while engaging the occupying power in civilian protection. From the vantage point of November 2012 an opposite trend is observable. For example, after the air-raid sirens were heard in Jerusalem on November 16th 2012, the city authorities called landline telephones in Hebrew and English telling the inhabitants not to be alarmed and to wait for information. There was no message in Arabic. Disregard for the

¹⁷ Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Montenegro, the PA, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey; see PPRD South Programme (2012).

safety of Palestinian civilians is becoming more apparent in the civilian protection-civil defence interface, ranging from lack of urban planning and infrastructure maintenance in Palestinian neighbourhoods of Jerusalem to negligence in potentially life-threatening situations. The privatisation of security in Israel aggravates this trend, because many checkpoints are manned by private security companies. A consequent lack of a chain of command and thereby accountability, together with the sometimes-insufficient training of security guards, may lead to increased risks to civilians' safety.

Emergency preparedness in municipalities: varying degrees of awareness and readiness

Representatives of five municipalities were interviewed for this report: Jericho, Nablus, Ramallah, al-Walajah and Tarqumiya. The localities that were chosen represent different positions in terms of resources, numbers of inhabitants and vulnerability. The cities of Nablus, Jericho and Ramallah are in Area A. Al-Walajah village outside Bethlehem is a wall-affected community in Area C. Tarqumiya, a small town 14 kilometres from the city of Hebron, is divided between Areas B and C, reflecting the complex situation that exists in Hebron.

The questionnaire used in the interviews was compiled to measure awareness of national emergency strategy and priorities, variations in PCD activities, and to what extent the Civil Defence Law has been implemented at the community level. Special attention was paid to food and water security, the availability of electricity and access to medical treatment in a crisis situation. None of the locations has an emergency evacuation plan, which underlines the conflict framework of Palestinian civil defence: where could Palestinian civilians be evacuated to? The problem is that an emergency may be caused by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Areas A and B are separated from each other by Area C and closed military areas, and co-ordination between the PA and Israeli authorities is insufficient. Moreover, international

organisations have recommended that the PCD engage NGOs and volunteers, which it has done because of circumstance and, to an extent, by choice: NGOs are abundant and particularly educated unemployed youth perceive volunteer work in such organisations as one avenue to later employment. Because of circumstances, the PA has delegated important civilian protection elements to international organisations. Ultimately, it has relegated a range of civil defence and civilian protection responsibilities to communities and, consequently, to Palestinian families and households.

Responses to the questionnaire showed varying levels of awareness and implementation of recent national plans and efforts. Jericho (47,000 inhabitants, Area A) is the first Palestinian town to have a comprehensive emergency plan.¹⁸ Eventually every community should have one. The reasons for Jericho's pilot role are not entirely clear, but several indicators make the choice understandable. Jericho suffered major earthquakes in 1033 and 1927, and due to its seismic location has been chosen as a twin to a town in Iceland, a country with high-level DRR expertise due to its geographic vulnerability and volcanic activity. Moreover, Jericho is the hub of Palestinian security capacity-building, because both the Police Academy and the Institute of Security Studies (including civil defence) are located there. The city is close to the Jordanian border and in the vicinity of the Jordan Valley, which consists entirely of either Area C or closed military areas.

The risk scenario of Jericho's Natural Disasters and Catastrophes Plan includes earthquakes, floods/heavy rains, water contamination, dryness/desertification, agricultural poisoning due to the incorrect use of agricultural pesticides, and the inflow of people from other countries. As part of the capacity-building process, an evacuation exercise was carried out that revealed serious gaps in the authorities' readiness in terms of activities,

¹⁸ Information about which communities have emergency plans varies from source to source. According to the PCD DDR Department, in addition to Jericho, Salfet has an emergency plan and Hebron's plan is in the planning stage. According to the head of the Projects Division of Ramallah municipality (interview, October 1st 2012), Ramallah's plan is being prepared. Municipality interviewees indicated whether their community has a plan or not.

mitigation and co-ordination.¹⁹ In spite of the city's pilot role, the mayor of Jericho municipality²⁰ was not aware of any national emergency strategy and there is no population shelter in the town. The town has a fire brigade and the PCD has organised training in fire fighting. First aid training courses are given and the Red Crescent provides an ambulance service. The mayor was not aware of inhabitants' food preparedness.

Nablus (180,000 inhabitants, Area A) has an emergency plan that was activated during the winter of 2011. The mayor has participated in a number of meetings and seminars among municipalities about the National Emergency Plan. The PA has also given the municipality instructions and orders as per the National Emergency Plan. A separate emergency plan to deal with the demolition of water infrastructure during an Israeli invasion exists, but the city does not have a population shelter or food preparedness plan. Several institutions provide ambulance services and there are hospitals in the city. Nablus has a fire brigade and there have been emergency awareness campaigns in local newspapers. Training in how to respond to a fire in a public place, traffic and other accidents, and so forth are frequently given by the Ministry of Health, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and the organisation Medical Relief Committees. Both the Red Cross and the Red Crescent provide training in first aid.

Nablus was the scene of intensive confrontations during the second *intifada* and remained relatively isolated until 2010. Focus-group interviews²¹ involving the inhabitants of Nablus and its surrounding villages revealed that mobility to and from the city has become less dangerous, but mobility between the surrounding villages has become more difficult and was perceived as more dangerous because of increased settler violence. Moreover, certain areas in the city and

its immediate vicinity are constantly exposed to settler violence. Some interlocutors explained how they had observed a change in the role of Israeli Defence Forces soldiers, which is relevant for civilian protection: the Israeli soldiers' role is now perceived by Palestinian civilians to be one of protecting them from settler violence. Some male interviewees perceived that Israel is using the settlers strategically through the process of protecting Palestinian civilians from violence perpetrated by settlers. In practice, they explained, this "protection" leads to control over and further restrictions on Palestinian civilians' mobility in the name of their own protection.

Ramallah (30,000 inhabitants, Area A) has had several meetings with the PCD, particularly on fire fighting and developing an emergency plan that would include training in evacuating buildings, and identifying necessary mechanisms and areas of contact. The city claims not to have sufficient resources to build shelters for the population. To the question "does the PA play a role in civilian protection", the head of the Projects Division replied, "in cases of war, no, because the PA does not have the ability to confront the Israeli army, but it protects civilians from crimes". This comment demonstrates the relationship between civilian protection and civil defence that the PCD has to accommodate. The respondent was aware of the National Emergency Plan, which has been discussed in the context of the need to develop an emergency plan. An ambulance service is provided by several organisations and the city has four hospitals. Organisations such as the Red Crescent, Medical Relief Committees and health committees provide training in civil defence procedures and first aid.

The village of al-Walajeh (2,500 inhabitants, Area C) is located in the vicinity of Bethlehem. The village does not have an emergency plan. The PCD has given civil defence training to volunteers on first aid and fire fighting, but does not have a centre in the village. Moreover, the organisation Health Committees has given training courses to nurses. Israel is responsible for civil defence in al-Walajeh. The village has a fire brigade, but no ambulance service or hospital. The closest hospital is 5 kilometres away and can be reached by private cars "if Israel does not implement its plan to put a gate at the entrance of the village".

¹⁹ Experts and civil defence authorities reflected on the lessons learned in a workshop organised in co-ordination with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Seismic Engineering Unit at the Urban Planning and Disaster Risk Reduction Center of An-Najah University and the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government entitled Towards a Palestinian Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Making Cities Resilient held at An-Najah University, Nablus, West Bank, February 7th 2012.

²⁰ Interview with the mayor of Jericho, September 30th 2012.

²¹ Facilitated by the author and Turid Smith Polfus, June 2011.

Tarqumiya (16,500 inhabitants, Areas B and C) has an emergency plan for natural and environmental catastrophes.²² The municipal council representative had not heard of the National Emergency Plan. The town has no resources to build a population shelter. It suffers from frequent water cuts and many inhabitants have private cisterns for water storage. According to the interviewee, “the inhabitants are peasants who keep a stock of food at home, which makes community-level food preparedness unnecessary”. The town depends on the ambulance service of a nearby town (Idna) and the closest hospital is in Hebron, making Tarqumiya vulnerable: the specific situation of Hebron sometimes leads to mobility restrictions between the city and its surrounding areas. The town does not have a fire brigade and the council is trying to raise funds for it from international donors. The PCD has not organised security training, but Red Crescent volunteers have given training courses in first aid. The small town is an apt example of Palestinian communities’ tradition of self-reliance in which the PA and international organisations are investing much hope in terms of civil defence.

Cultural factors and violence against women in an emergency

There is substantial empirical evidence that disasters exacerbate societal problems: marginalised groups become more marginalised and vulnerable groups more vulnerable. For example, children under 12 accounted for 65.9% of all deaths resulting from the Haiti earthquake in 2010 (Kolbe et al., 2010) and four adult women died for every adult male death (Kumpula, 2010). Moreover, conditions in camps for internally displaced persons, including elevated levels of population density and limited security, compounded by frustration and other forms of psychological distress related to hunger and joblessness, may increase the likelihood of residents experiencing sexual and psychical assaults, as happened in Haiti (Kumpula, 2010). These phenomena carry much policy relevance in the OPT.

²² Its existence was not mentioned in the information provided by the PCD.

Palestinians see strong associations between gender relations and the concepts of security (*amn*), safety (*aman*) and protection (*himaya*).²³ In their minds, particularly safety and protection are linked to sexual harassment and the potential for sexual violence on the part of Palestinian men and, to an extent, Israeli soldiers.²⁴ However, the threat of intra-Palestinian gendered violence and harassment is a greater concern than the threat from Israeli soldiers towards Palestinian women, albeit with locality- and situation-specific reservations. Although at first glance there may not be an apparent linkage to civil defence (*mida al-difai*), this association of meanings illustrates the interconnection of external and internal security threats, and how the conflict situation forges gender relations. In Palestinian society women and girls as potential objects and victims of sexual violations are normatively held personally responsible for sexual safety threats towards them from early puberty onwards. At the same time, a woman’s honour, as reflected in her reputation, is considered an extension of her family’s honour, which points to the males of her patrilineal family. Because their honour is at stake, men are held to be the guardians of their close kinwomen’s honour, particularly that of young unmarried women, who are considered the most vulnerable group. This has important implications for catastrophic and emergency situations.²⁵

During the war in Gaza in 2009 people sometimes took shelter in schools and other public buildings, in which men and women were segregated. It was a concern for the families, especially for the fathers who voiced this concern, that they did not have their young women and girls in sight at all times. This

²³ The following sections are based on the author’s fieldwork; focus-group discussions conducted in the West Bank by the author and Smith Polfus in May–June 2011, and by the author in July–August 2011; and focus groups conducted by the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) through community-based organisations in Gaza in the aftermath of the war in 2009. The results of the focus groups were not published and were provided by courtesy of UNDP/PAPP.

²⁴ For the topic area, see also DCAF (2010); Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (2009).

²⁵ This phenomenon has a long history among the Palestinians. For example, in the early 20th century when bad weather conditions destroyed the harvest in the north and people wandered around Palestine, families considered it very difficult to supervise a girl’s proper conduct and consequently protect family honour. They were thus very eager to marry them off; see Isotalo (2005: 90). Furthermore, the age at which girls married declined during the first *intifada*.

was considered particularly problematic if young girls were together without older female family members. Further, women reported incidents when families had to escape their homes in the middle of the night as a result of an air strike or a fire. In these circumstances, women sometimes had to flee in their nightgowns and without a *hijab*. On occasions this led to criticism of them, which in turn could have negative consequences such as scolding or physical assault from male family members. Women reported – as they also did in violence-prone areas in the focus groups conducted by the author in the West Bank in 2011 – that they started sleeping in their prayer clothes in case they had to escape their homes in the middle of the night. Even in an emergency it is not socially acceptable for a woman to be seen without a *hijab* (if she normally wears one). The current effort by UN partners and the PCD to “build a culture of emergency preparedness” should take this cultural phenomenon into account and address it seriously, because it adds considerably to women’s burdens in emergency situations. Moreover, these efforts should be extended to Gaza, which currently receives no international support in terms of its civil defence systems.

Moreover, the Household Emergency Plan includes a detailed list of goods and equipment that every household should have ready in cases of natural or human-made emergencies or crises. Although the emergency list includes diapers for children and addresses the special concerns of the elderly and disabled, it does not include women’s sanitary towels and necessities for menstrual hygiene. Past emergencies in the OPT have shown that special attention should be given to women’s hygiene needs. For example, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) recalls women’s experiences during the siege of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, where menstruating women were confined in a room for several days during the heavy fighting in the camp. As a result of inadequate hygiene and insufficient sanitary towels, some of them started suffering from cystitis. In addition to women, only one man was present. He became extremely angry because of the smell of blood and urine, ordering the women to stay in one corner of the room. The women reported that they felt doubly punished for being women: firstly by suffering the hardships of the siege and fighting while bearing the responsibility

of feeding their children and other household members, and secondly by their own menfolk for being women.

Research by the author on security and protection among Palestinian civilians revealed localised and gendered experiences, perceptions, and needs in terms of security and protection. For example, attitudes towards informal justice varied greatly. The extent of this variation tended to be related to the availability of governmental structures and the Palestinian civil police, as well as gender, i.e. whether the case involved women, sexuality and personal status. People stated that their first choice would be to turn to the police in criminal cases. That the civil police have limited access to Area B and no access to Area C or “access-restricted areas” was clearly expressed in people’s answers. In such situations informal justice was perceived as the only avenue to obtain justice and maintain order.

The variations that occurred in terms of access to justice had primarily to do with gender relations, but other issues surfaced as well. Respondents expressed more readiness to use informal justice in matters of family such as domestic violence towards women. Men and women preferred to settle such matters through the intervention and mediation of family elders. Informal justice was also sometimes considered a preferred alternative in inter-clan or inter-family disputes, including cases of killing. In spite of this preference, respondents acknowledged that informal justice is “justice of the stronger party”, but that it serves to maintain and preserve social cohesion.

Activities such as *atwa* and *sulh by rijal al-islam* (men of reconciliation) committees have been formalised and institutionalised by the PA, and thus made a part of the formal criminal justice system. Their existence and Palestinians’ reasons for using them cannot be separated from the overall conflict context, where family has been and remains the primal source and locus of safety, security and protection. This association carries great importance for emerging activities related to the interface of civilian protection and civil defence. Systematic and consistent efforts to create emergency preparedness in Palestinian areas are very recent. From the beginning the PA delegated responsibility for security – understood

in a wide sense to include aspects of human security such as food security and care for the elderly and disabled – to families. Due to the patriarchal structure of Palestinian society and the gendered division of labour, this meant that the PA delegated the responsibility to protect to male family heads. In practice, security and safety are then built on gendered expectations, duties and responsibilities that are forged by a combination of *adat u taqalit* (traditions and customs) and *sharia*.

According to the author’s research in 2001-03, 2007 and 2010-11, and unpublished focus-group material collected by UNDP via local community-based organisations in the aftermath of the Gaza war in 2009, large gaps exist between normative expectations and actual practices. Without exception, interlocutors stated that “the man is the protector of the woman”. The understandings of the term “protection” encompassed various aspects of safety and security, ranging from “hard security” to “human security”. In other words, they reflected respondents’ main security concerns, which are often economic. The responsibility to protect thus ranges from providing protection from physical harm and danger to providing economic/food security and safeguarding a woman’s honour as an extension of a man’s honour.

In times of crisis – which points directly to civilian protection and civil defence – women can become responsible for both food security and physical protection. When unemployment affected the male family head, respondents reported that it was often considered beneath the man’s pride to collect food coupons, particularly if they were distributed by women’s organisations. Collecting the food coupons implied that the women had to move outside their immediate neighbourhood, which they were often criticised for: women “showing themselves” in this way was considered to be transgressing social norms. Some women reported being beaten by their husbands when they collected the coupons, although the husbands were aware that the coupons were the family’s only means of survival. Both sexes have internalised that “men need to vent their anger and frustration” during times of crisis. Some men who acknowledged this tendency reported having developed avoidance strategies where they adopted a different sleeping cycle so that they slept during the day to avoid the presence

of children and women and stayed awake during nights “to guard”, which is also normatively accepted from a protection perspective. Given the potential confinement to a closed space that both natural and human-made catastrophes can lead to, these issues should be taken into consideration and addressed as an important part of “creating a culture of emergency preparedness”.

Furthermore, as evidenced by the author’s fieldwork in Ramallah during 2002-03 at the peak of the second *intifada*, normative protection expectations and responsibilities can be reversed in practice in the face of military violence. When Israeli soldiers knocked on the door to enter a house, whether during the day or the night, a woman sometimes opened the door regardless of whether there were adult males in the house or not. This practice is not random; it was confirmed to the author in 2007 in a wall-affected community and again in 2011 by female focus-group participants who reside in violence-prone areas of Hebron. When asked how this related to the strongly internalised role expectation of the man as protector, the women explained that a man would risk a greater danger if he opened the door and therefore it was safer that a woman did so because it would be less likely that she would be physically hurt. Whether the likelihood is actually the case or not, it is important to pay attention both to the persistence of gender-role expectations, regardless of actual safety and protection practices and their systematic transgression during times of crisis. Both phenomena increase women’s vulnerability to violence, as does women’s fear of losing a male family head, which would further marginalise them in society.

Global evidence confirms that gender-blind disaster aid deepens existing discriminatory structures. Great care should be taken to mainstream gender in the emerging practices of Palestinian civil defence.

Conclusions

The legally anomalous situation in the Palestinian areas, the Palestinian statehood bid, the political and geographical division between the West Bank and Gaza, and the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict are blurring the lines between

civilian protection – as mandated by international humanitarian law – and civil defence. Therefore it is essential to approach the two facets of Palestinian civilians’ safety in an integrated way.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip are highly vulnerable to natural hazards. At present, the Gaza administration approaches civilians’ safety by combining internal and external threats, while local armed factions expose civilians’ lives to danger from urban warfare. In turn, in the West Bank the PA is committed to the Hyogo Framework of Action and addresses the interface of civilian protection and civil defence in a way that accommodates aid practices. Civil defence functions through a combination of a governmental organisation – i.e. the PCD – NGOs – most notably the Palestinian Red Crescent – and volunteers. International support to the safety of Palestinian civilians is divided in terms of civilian protection and civil defence. Civilian protection remains strictly humanitarian, so it has been possible to extend civilian protection to Gaza.

As for the division between the Gaza administration and the PA, observable differences – i.e. that Hamas views civil defence as explicitly gendered and combines internal and external human-made security threats – do not mean that the cultural value basis of civil defence would be very different in Gaza and the West Bank. This can be argued especially through gendered examples. The observable differences in the approach to civil defence reflect more on the international engagement of both governments than Palestinians’ values and norms. Gaza remains outside the system of international support to civil defence, although even more than in the West Bank, civilian protection and civil defence are intertwined in Gaza. Currently the international community’s involvement in civilian protection in Gaza focuses on food security and access to basic services such as health and education (mainly dealt with by UNRWA) and to early recovery, as demonstrated in the aftermath of the 2009 war. This means that prevention, mitigation and co-ordination as parts of DRR are left without external support.

International support to the PCD should be considered from the perspectives of conflict sensitivity and gender sensitivity. Current policy

documents place a strong emphasis on technical support in the event of natural disasters. These efforts are laudable and include attempts to enhance co-ordination between the PA and Israel. However, it remains to be seen whether emerging practices work sufficiently in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which forges the operational DRR environment, instead of working around it. Furthermore, the unresolved conflict poses substantial challenges to the possibility of making DRR a part of the state-in-the-making’s “sustainable development plans”, as recommended in UN organisations’ and the World Bank’s integrated approach. In spite of Prime Minister Fayad’s efforts, it is questionable whether it is realistic to expect sustainable development in the West Bank in the near future.

Together with international supporters, the PCD aims to create “a culture of preparedness”. However, current plans appear to be gender blind, which has a tendency to exacerbate existing inequalities and potentially increase violence against women in disasters. “Protection” is a gendered and relational notion among Palestinians and, as demonstrated in this report, concrete and normative protection expectations and responsibilities easily reverse or distort in a time of crisis and are systematically transgressed. Therefore it would be desirable to gender mainstream current efforts in the field of DRR and make gender sensitivity a part of the “culture of preparedness” by addressing the cultural phenomena discussed in the last section of this report.

The PA has relegated a range of safety and protection responsibilities to families and households. As civil defence does in many countries, the PCD relies on volunteers. In the Palestinian case, this is also due to Israeli-imposed access and mobility restrictions. Also, UNDP recommends community-based disaster risk preparedness and mitigation in its DRR assessment. Thus it can be argued, as has been done throughout this report, that the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict forges the conditions of DRR, although donors treat civil defence mainly as an internal Palestinian issue, demonstrating its difference to civilian protection. It can be further argued that the PA and the international community essentially privatise the overlap of

civilian protection and civil defence by delegating large civil defence responsibilities to communities, which are supposed to rely on themselves. This effectively means that families have to fend for themselves. In light of the gendered examples that were discussed in the last section, such a policy approach may deepen instead of improve the predicament of Palestinian civilians in a “protection-based crisis”.

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