

## **This speech was written by Sahar, a Palestinian doctor. It was delivered on International Women's Day 2026**

Today, on IWD we gather to celebrate resilience, honour achievements, and recommit to the fight for equality and justice for all women. We speak of empowerment, of breaking barriers, and of a future where every woman can live in dignity and freedom. And as a Palestinian, I stand before you to speak about the Palestinian women - mothers, daughters, students, workers, political prisoners who are paying the heaviest price, held captive inside the prisons of the settler-colonial regime, torn from their homes amidst genocidal attacks on our people.

Palestinian women have stood by men on all aspects of life to fight the Ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. For decades, they have resisted displacement, military violence, imprisonment, and apartheid, while sustaining families and communities under siege. Their struggle has always been political, collective, and central to the broader Palestinian struggle for liberation.

And today, since the government of Netanyahu and Itamar Ben Gvir, the most extreme right-wing government in Israel's history, took office, new patterns of gender-based practices and crimes have emerged. These aim to violate the human dignity of Palestinian women and girls and threaten their rights to life, physical, psychological, and sexual safety.

According to Addameer, at least 66 Palestinian women are currently held in Israeli prisons. These figures do not include Palestinian women from Gaza who have been forcibly disappeared into military detention facilities, like Sde Teiman, with their whereabouts unknown to families or lawyers.

From the moment of arrest, Palestinian women are subjected to both physical and psychological torture. They are beaten with rifles and subjected to electric shocks. They are stripped naked and searched in front of male soldiers. They are taken from their homes, often during night raids, blindfolded, shackled, beaten, and humiliated. They are transported in metal cages, denied food, water, and access to toilets for hours.

And once inside prisons, this abuse intensifies and is nothing short of torture. On top of all this abuse, the right that all prisoners have to Medical care is deliberately denied. Women with cancer and chronic illnesses are given painkillers instead of treatment and left to deteriorate

For example, today two political prisoners suffering from cancer, face a policy of slow execution. Fidaa Assaf, 49 from Qalqilya, was diagnosed with leukaemia two months before her arrest. Since her imprisonment, her health has collapsed. Israel has denied her chemotherapy, providing only painkillers while her cancer spreads.

Suhair Zaaqiq, from Al-Khalil, suffers from a womb tumour and is having persistent bleeding and is denied treatment.

And for pregnant women, imprisonment becomes reproductive violence. Addameer has documented cases in which Palestinian women were denied prenatal care and proper nutrition. At least one woman was forced to give birth while imprisoned, shackled with chains during labour, under armed guard, and separated from her newborn shortly afterward.

We all know that sexual abuse is rooted in unequal and oppressive power relations. Colonialism, occupation, war, and Israel's ongoing apartheid regime, creates fertile ground for this.

And now there is a new cruel twist: Israel's Parliament has passed the first reading of a bill that would allow executions in prisons –but only of Palestinian prisoners for what they call “terrorist” acts – a wide definition in Israel. There would be no right of appeal and, as we speak, a dedicated execution facility is being prepared. UN experts have condemned the bill, warning that it violates the right to life, discriminates against Palestinians, and would constitute a war crime.

But the *sumud* of our women is unbreakable. This month, three Palestinian women in Damon Prison, Shorouq Dweiat, Mona Qa'dan, and Marah Bakier—launched an open-ended hunger strike. They are refusing to be crushed.

On this International Women's Day there is no women's liberation while Palestinian women are imprisoned without charge.

There is no feminism that ignores colonial violence.

There is no justice while women give birth in chains.

To the women in Damon Prison: Your struggle is our struggle. Your chains on your wrists are the chains on the conscience of humanity. We will break them together.