



ROMENA Newsletter

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Dear reader,

Marked annually on March 8th, International Women's Day celebrates women's achievements and raises awareness about women's equality. UN Women announced this year's theme as, "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world." The theme celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this issue of our newsletter we also celebrate efforts to empower women and efforts by women for women from across the region. We look at inspiring women working every day to end Violence Against Women & Girls (VAW&G), at women fighting human trafficking and saving lives, at women providing aid, as well as the role of women as a key change enabler within UNODC's Strategic Vision for Africa 2030, and more.

I hope you enjoy this issue and that you share with us the story of a woman who inspires you!



Cristina Albertin,
UNODC Regional Representative
for the Middle East and North Africa

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Promoting Gender-Sensitive Reporting in Palestinian Media

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW&G) is a grave human rights violation with one in three women worldwide experiencing physical and sexual violence. In the era of social media, such violence has branched out into new arenas, to include online bullying and harassment. New forms of violence require new language and new approaches to tackle them effectively. Journalists and media professionals play a critical role not only in raising

awareness about violence against women but also in challenging the negative traditions, attitudes, and stereotypes that perpetuate it.

Funded by the Government of Canada and jointly implemented by UNODC, UN Women, UNFPA, and UN-Habitat, the HAYA Joint Programme seeks to support national stakeholders to eliminate violence against women and girls in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Through the HAYA Joint Programme, UNODC is working with media professionals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to ensure media reporting on violence against women is respectful of survivors' fundamental human rights, conducted in a non-discriminatory manner, and highlighting survivors' stories as advocates for positive change. Since 2019, UNODC in partnership with the Media Development Center at the Bir Zeit University and the Ministry of Women's Affairs Media Network, have trained 167 media professionals and journalists from 17 media outlets.

Her Story: Dr. Pansee Abdel Fattah Using Forensics to Bring Justice to Women Survivors of VAW in Egypt

Through its mandate, UNODC works to support the Member States to reach the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." A key pillar of such efforts is enhancing Member States' responses to VAW by developing institutional and professional capacities relevant to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of women and girls. Dr. Pansee Abdel Fattah is a forensic doctor at the Egyptian Forensic Medicine Authority (FMA). She is responsible to carry out examinations for women survivors of VAW. When speaking with Dr. Pansee on one of the notable things she learned from UNODC's trainings, she added that "UNODC changed the understanding and way of treating cases or patients of violence against women in general. I learned not to be a judgmental person and to never judge the patient with my own personal viewpoint."



Part of Dr. Pansee's every day is comforting the VAW survivor and providing her with the trust she needs to be able to undergo the examination. When speaking on the psychological angle to an examination, Dr. Pansee clarified that "I received technical training on using specialized devices to examine patients who are victims of sexual assault – such as the colposcopy device. I learned how to provide the survivor with the needed trust and safety to feel reassured and allows me to examine her and provide her with the support she needs." The FMA is responsible, amongst its many duties, to examine women who report a form of violent or sexual assault to the police. The availability and use of quality forensic science services, data and information is an essential element supporting the operational work of law enforcement, effective and fair criminal justice systems, and evidence-based policymaking.



Revitalizing the Yemen Coast Guard Through a Gender-Focused Approach

The Yemen Coast Guard (YCG) lost a significant part of its capacity and capability during the war that ravaged the country. Female officers, whose duties were no longer deemed as a priority for operations, were disproportionately affected in the aftermath. To reverse the trend, the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea sub-programme of UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) is currently

developing a project alongside YCG, to specifically support gender mainstreaming and re-prioritize the integration and empowerment of women in the service.

Colonel Abdullah was the very first female officer from the YCG to participate in UNODC GMCP's Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) courses. She referred to UNODC's push for increased female participation as a big step forward in empowering women in Yemen and transforming the sector.

"I would love to see the day when the Yemeni females become an essential part of the YCG. I would love to see them enrolling on the training such as seamanship and others," she said, clarifying that female officer's perspectives bring value to the service. Colonel Noor remains hopeful about the future for female YCG officers. "I would love to see them doing great things, like working for the YCG operations department, such as operation room personnel."

Her Story: Ms. Amina Boukamcha Supports Victims of Trafficking in Persons (TiP) in Tunisia

"My tasks as an officer in charge of the victim files is to detect suspected cases of human trafficking based on reports we receive. Once a victim is identified and rescued, I am also assisting them by making sure they have access to legal support. This is only possible through the close collaboration of all entities providing victims support, such as Ministries, civil society, and international organizations.

As a social worker by training, I have over 20 years of experience in supporting people in vulnerable situations. I joined INLCTP two years ago, and since then I have been supporting victims of human trafficking. I see my work as rewarding. Being there for the most vulnerable and helping them at a very difficult point in their lives fuels my commitment. Even though sometimes, some situations are very difficult. A victim who passed away recently hit me hard. But I know that I have to stay strong.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we had to rethink our assistance. We started to do counselling over the phone and we also provide material support such as food and clothes. UNODC's support to my office is remarkable. The Organization is a partner that always encourages and supports our activities and initiatives. What I appreciate the most are the trainings UNODC provides."



Her Story: Forensic Science Laboratory Expert Ms. Rawan Tomalieh and VAW Survivors in Palestine

UNODC is working with justice institutions to enhance forensic capacity when investigating cases of violence and improve forensic services to its survivors.

Investigative teams in different governorates throughout the West Bank collect, classify, preserve, and then transfer evidence to the Palestinian forensic science laboratory. Launched in 2016, the lab uses modern technology and science in criminal investigations to impartially examine evidence collected from crime scenes or bodies of violence survivors. This evidence is then presented to courts to establish the crime and help identify the perpetrator. As the only forensic science laboratory in the West Bank, its work will be crucial in criminal cases, such as sexual assaults or homicides.



Twenty-nine-year-old forensic science laboratory expert, Ms. Rawan Tomalieh works in the laboratory which she says plays a crucial role in achieving justice for survivors of violence. In the past year alone, the forensic science laboratory has received over 1,690 cases. “Working in the forensic laboratory has increased my confidence in the Palestinian judiciary and justice system,” states Ms. Rawan.

In the case of one woman killed in a shooting incident between her family and the Palestinian police, the forensic lab proved the bullet originated from a gun belonging to a family member, allowing the perpetrators to be caught and justice be found for the victim. Rawan says this is just one example of many stories demonstrating how important the lab’s work is. “Without the forensic lab, all cases against perpetrators of violence would be dropped,” says Rawan. “They would escape punishment, and the rights of the survivors would be lost.”

Since 2019, the UNODC, through the HAYA Joint Programme, has supervised the establishment of a forensic biological examinations section within the forensic science lab. With the generous support of Canada, the lab was also established by UNODC to support the Civil Police with a modern, state-of art forensic laboratory where drugs, chemicals, firearms, tool marks and documents can be analysed. Through specialized training started in July 2020, its forensic science laboratory experts are now better skilled in biological evidence examinations and formulating opinion evidence for the justice sector. Twenty-five Palestinian police first responders and crime scene and family protection officers were also trained in forensic evidence handling and management.



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