



# **A Report on the Work of Kayan – Feminist Organization During the War on Gaza**

From October 2023 to March 2024



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## Introduction

Immediately upon the outbreak of the war on October 7, 2023, all segments of the Palestinian community in Israel, and in all areas, faced political persecutions, arbitrary and racist police practices, in addition to the incitement by the Israeli street, which placed every Palestinian in the dock, simply for being a Palestinian. Based on previous recurring experiences, both recently and in the distant past, it was not difficult to foresee what our society would face following these events. Kayan, therefore, was quick to mobilize its staff and bodies and harness all its tools in order to address the needs expected to arise during this period, as a result of the expected attacks, the features of which began to emerge on the morning after the 7th of last October (2023).

To address those needs, Kayan has set up a support and emergency phone hotline dedicated for receiving complaints and inquiries, which establishment was made known to all departments and sectors, and in coordination with other institutions active in the field. Operators of the Support and Emergency Hotline received complaints and sorted them by type of case. In addition to providing psychological and emotional support over the Hotline, legal and professional counselling has also been provided to callers, both female and male, the majority of whom have complained about having been persecuted and/or harassed in various forms and places. In parallel, a number of lawyers, both female and male, with whom we jointly work during emergencies, have been recruited to provide legal advice and guidance, on a voluntary basis, and to accompany the people who approached us.

In this report, we review the most important issues that Kayan has handled through the Hotline with the outbreak of the war, and for which we have provided follow up, as well as legal, moral and social support. We also note the activities that have been carried out to meet the needs created by the reality of the war. A description of these issues is presented in the sections following the Support and Emergency Hotline section. Statistics and closing remarks are presented at the end.

## **Support and Emergency Hotline**

From October 8, 2023, until mid-March 2024, the Support and Emergency Hotline at Kayan received 715 telephone calls from both women and men from all segments of the community, including workers, imams in mosques, engineers, workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, babysitters, students, lawyers and artists. Most of the callers have been subjected to various forms of incitement, political persecution, violence and restrictions, mostly in their workplaces or in postgraduate academic institutions and universities. In addition, there were about 50 cases of domestic violence that were exposed three months after the outbreak of the war on Gaza, for reasons that we will mention later.

## **Samples of Cases Received Through the Hotline**

### **Harassment in the Workplace**

Many calls to the Emergency Hotline have focused on harassment and persecution, in various forms, specifically in the workplace, in many different areas. Through coordination with Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, it was agreed to transfer workplace complaints that reach them to Kayan's Hotline, while Kayan undertook to transfer to Adalah all inquiries that required legal representation, and which dealt with persecution and harassment in educational institutions.

Below is a summary of some of unlawful practices coming out of the received inquiries.

## **1. Surprise Summons to Hearings Incompatible with Legal Due Process**

Employers have summoned female workers/employees for hearings unexpectedly, and often following posts they made on social media. In most cases, the summons did not satisfy the legal due process requiring the opportunity to consult with and be represented by a lawyer; to obtain all documents and testimonies upon which the employer based the decision to call for the hearing; the worker's right to request a postponement of the hearing; and even the worker's right not to appear at the hearing, or to only provide a written response.

The callers described approaches that were practically identical in the employers' practices, including, but not limited to:

- Summoning workers to hearings only an hour or a few hours before the scheduled date and time of the hearing, without informing the workers of their right to postpone the hearing.
- Concealing the reasons for the worker's summons to a hearing and/or the material upon which the employer relied to summon the worker. This deprived the worker of the opportunity of preparing for the hearing, and obtaining legal advice and representation before and during the hearing, in order to respond to the allegations that would be made against him/her, and to prevent any abuses of the law.

## **2. Arbitrary and Unlawful Dismissal**

- Some employers have dismissed workers without explaining the reasons for the dismissal, and without prior warning, or meeting the notice in advance requirements by law.
- Employers have compelled workers to submit their resignation from work under the threat of legal prosecution if they did not do that.
- A pregnant woman was dismissed from her work, in a manner inconsistent with the provisions of the law prohibiting the dismissal of pregnant women without the prior approval of the Ministry of Labour.
- The unilateral cancellation of work contracts, in the case of freelance workers, despite the absence of any breach of contract terms by the service provider (freelancer).

## **3. Abusing Working Terms and Conditions**

- Forcing workers to take unpaid leave, without fulfilling the legal reasons that would allow such leave.
- Reducing the number of working hours and/or changing the work schedule in a way that did not take the worker's circumstances into account, for example setting working hours that conflicted with academic or vocational education hours.
- Defamation and slandering the worker's reputation in the workplace and/or through social media, while creating a hostile work environment.

- Failure to provide protection and support to workers who have been subjected to incitement campaigns by their colleagues.
- Ousting workers and removing them from the workers' WhatsApp group(s) through which they were supposed to receive instructions/updates/announcements/work schedules from the employer.

#### **4. Blatant Encroachment on Workers' Freedom of Expression on Social Media**

- Forcing workers to remove posts they made on social media only because the employer, or some colleagues, did not like or agree with them.
- Compelling workers to express a position of solidarity with Israel and, if they refused to do so, then they faced threats, persecution and/or getting ostracized by the employer and/or even colleagues.

#### **5. Filing Complaints with the Police**

- Some employers or even work colleagues have filed police complaints against workers, subjecting them to judicial liability and sometimes arrest.



## **"Transparent" Workers**

This term is used to refer to illegal workers working informally. These are women workers who are not registered, are not on the payroll, and are without any social security or working rights; they are often paid below the minimum wage. Since the outbreak of the war, we have received dozens of calls from such transparent workers who have been dismissed from their work for their national background. While some of them were dismissed because of the publication of supplications and appeals to stop the war, others were dismissed without any reason whatsoever (they did not even have social media accounts). These women workers have lost their jobs, and went back to square one, the economic dependence on the husband, father or brother. Many of them suffered domestic violence at the hands of their husbands and families, as they were blamed and held responsible for having been dismissed under the various pretexts.

## **Student Harassment in Academic Institutions**

- Some universities and higher education institutions, such as colleges and universities, have suspended some students for temporary periods, and removed others from school, often because of social media posts unrelated to the educational institution.
- Educational institutes have condoned, in general, racist incitement, defamation and hate speech by Israeli students against Arab students, their colleagues.

## **Gender-based Extortion and Threats**

- Women workers (and students) were threatened by their co-workers (and colleagues) with exposing their sexual orientations (i.e. lesbian) to their families and community, if they did not declare their solidarity with Israel, and condemnation of Hamas.
- Women workers (and students) were threatened by their co-workers (and colleagues) with posting their photos, or information about their personal relationships, or disseminating claims that they had sexual relations, unless they declared their solidarity with Israel, and condemnation of Hamas.

## **Incitement, Defamation and Blackmail on Social Networks**

- Many young women and men have been subjected to harassment, incitement, blackmail, defamation or the threat of defamation, on their social media pages. The harassments originated from accounts unknown to the victims, and often followed posts that indicated their contents, for example:
  - Appeals to stop the war
  - Expressions of sympathy for the children or civilian victims in Gaza
  - Condemnation of violence against Palestinian citizens in the state
  - Posting Quranic verses

- Adopting black as the profile on Facebook
- Old posts of a political nature, related to the Palestinian cause or to participation in demonstrations with Palestinian flags, published years ago, and not related to current events.

### **Refusal of the Authorities to Renew Residency Permits**

The Support and Emergency Hotline received calls from a number of Palestinian women (and one man) whose permits for residency within the Green line were refused by the Israeli authorities, 50% of them with children, although their lives were at risk in their original towns. Not getting their residency permits renewed meant that they were either denied the possibility to work, or were rendered “transparent” women working without rights, and subject to extortion because of their illegal stay.

### **War and Domestic Violence**

In the first three months of the war, we witnessed a total decline in calls related to domestic violence. As the war entered its fourth month, such calls resumed to the Hotline in a very intense and worrying manner, through which we got exposed to the extent to which the consequences of the war had exacerbated domestic violence towards women. It should be noted that we were not surprised by the women's reluctance, in the early months of the war, to report cases of domestic violence. Our work over more

than two decades has demonstrated the phenomenon of women placing themselves at the bottom of the priority scale during national crises, in response to society's expectations of them to put their lives, their safety and their personal security on hold for the benefit of the "bigger crisis".

### **Fear, Panic and Psychological Distress**

We have provided psychological support to more than 94% of the callers (female) to the Hotline. These women have experienced cases of extreme fear, panic or psychological distress that have greatly affected them at work, in the family, and in social circles. The need for such support was evident in all such calls, regardless of the type and source of the harassment. A survey by Kayan showed that the most common sentiments during this period were the fear of losing their jobs, feeling helpless due to the policy of muzzling voices, and the sense of losing security.

### **Requests for Material Relief Assistance**

Kayan received requests for material relief assistance following the dismissal of the family provider from his/her work. The majority of requests came from unregistered "transparent" working women. These were single breadwinners who lost their jobs, without any compensation, having worked for two to seven years.

# Statistics

The overall estimate of total calls received through the Hotline during this period was:



## Classification of Calls



**Following harassment at companies and establishments**, including: aviation, telecommunications, banks, Hi-Tech, technical support, hotels, clothing networks and shops, factories, private enterprises, shops, restaurants, delivery outfits, lawyers' offices, engineering offices, accounting offices, cafes, supermarkets, mechanics' shops.



**Following harassment at health care establishments**, such as: hospitals, dental clinics, health service providers, medical laboratories.



**Following the refusal to have their residency permits renewed.**



**Following harassment at educational institutions**, such as: schools, kindergartens, colleges, universities



**4%**

**Other:** Humanitarian assistance, summons for investigation at police stations, searches, and/or confiscation of phones and computers

freedom of expression did not prevent harassments, as those laws were not given any attention by employers and the authorities.

Therefore, the awareness-raising campaign included the following:

- E-seminars for the general public on: the reality of Arab students during war; harassment and restrictions in the workplace and educational institutions; freedom of expression during war; protection of information on the network.
- Seminars and workshops in person for various groups, including: Arab Doctors' Union, university students, women's groups, youth groups.

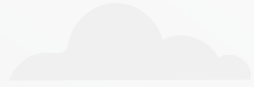
The seminars and workshops dealt with arbitrary dismissals - labour rights and laws; psychological support; psychological effects of war; confronting fear and promoting psychological immunity; women and war; the implications of war on freedom of expression in the workplace and beyond.

## Closing Remarks

With every crisis that sweeps the country, Israel's Palestinian minority suffers discrimination, whether by exclusion, neglect, political harassment or racism at its core. Even if discrimination and oppression seem different at the surface, they are the same in substance at the core. The result of this reality is that the Palestinian society, in general, suffers the consequences of this discrimination, and Palestinian women, in particular, bear the high costs of the double discrimination against them, by the state on the one hand, and by the society on the other hand. When many

women lose the support and backing of their families, the injustice multiplies, first against the women, and consequently society as a whole.

At Kayan, we continue to invite all women of our society, who are affected by any form of violence, discrimination, harassment or threat, to come to us through the Support and Emergency Hotline, for consultation, support and legal representation, as and whenever needed.



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