

Report reveals Israeli soldiers sexually harassing Palestinian women across West Bank

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Palestinians cross an Israeli checkpoint in Bethlehem, in the occupied West Bank, on April 5, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

Gaza City, August 30 (RHC)-- In yet another shocking revelation, Israeli forces have increasingly been sexually harassing Palestinian women at checkpoints in the city of al-Khalil and elsewhere across the occupied West.

According to testimonies reported by Haaretz on Thursday, in one incident, a young Palestinian woman said an Israeli soldier exposed himself to her at a checkpoint on August 17th.

The woman said she was crossing the Tamar checkpoint in the Tel Rumeida neighborhood when the soldier stopped her and instructed her to open her bag. After she complied, he took down part of his trousers.

"Out of shock, I left the checkpoint and didn't know what was happening, I felt as if someone had given me a slap," she was quoted as saying.

The woman was further threatened when she later complained about her harasser. "I was exhausted and depressed by it. Now it's easier for me, but when I want to go through the checkpoint I'm afraid the same thing will happen again," the woman said.

Following the incident, other women reported similar humiliating treatment by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints in recent weeks.

One young woman reported that an Israeli soldier took photos of her and her sister when they were crossing the same checkpoint.

Another reported that an Israeli soldier searched her phone while holding her hand. "He grabbed my hand and told me to open the phone. I told him these were my private photos, why should I open them?" she said.

Others reported experiencing regular verbal abuse as they passed checkpoints.

Local Palestinian residents also reported that since metal detectors were installed following October 7, women are sometimes required to remove their clothing. In some cases, women reported being instructed to remove their hijabs (Islamic veils).

In June, a UN report found that Israeli authorities had systematically subjected Palestinian women and girls to sexual violence. The vicious methods included forced nudity, public stripping, sexualized torture and harassment.

The report concluded that the abuses form part of the Israeli forces' operating procedures. "These acts were intended to humiliate and degrade the victims and the Palestinian community at large, by perpetuating gender stereotypes that create a sense of shame, subordination, emasculation and inferiority," the report read.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, Reem al-Salem, earlier this year expressed her deep concern about the increasing cases of rape committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian women at the al-Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian prisoner support organizations have already urged international institutions to "take action" as a panel of UN experts said the reports of sexual assault against Palestinian women in Israeli detention were "credible."



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