

NETWORK MEMBER: Awn ACCESS TO JUSTICE NETWORK



Bringing Justice to the People of Conflict-Battered Gaza

Awn Access to Justice is a UNDP-funded network of legal aid providers in the Gaza Strip, bringing together the Palestinian Bar Association, 25 civil society organisations, young law professionals and academic institutions. It provides legal services, including representation, litigation, mediation and arbitration, in 18 mobile legal aid clinics across the Gaza Strip.

Founded 2011

www.awnnetwork.ps



Members of a mobile legal aid clinic pay a visit to a client in her home.

The Jabalia Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip is one of the most crowded spots on earth. Home to around 100,000 Palestinians, it covers just 1.4 km². The camp was established at the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and has for decades been a concrete shanty, where most families share one or two rooms. Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, with the accompanying Israeli blockade and cycles of conflict, economic opportunities across the Gaza Strip have collapsed – most of the population now relies on international food aid.

It is against this background that Palestinian Bar Association's Awn Network for Access to Justice came across the case of Amal, a 53-year old woman from Jabalia.

"This story applies to the suffering of many

women," says Salamah Biseso, president of Awn. "Amal is living in a refugee camp, and was deprived of her right to education, her right to work, and her right to inheritance, in addition to suffering early and traditional marriage - and being married to an inappropriate and incompetent man. Furthermore, she fell victim to all kinds of gender-based violence, including being robbed and the theft of her belongings."

When Amal approached the Awn legal clinic she was hesitant and still had not made up her mind about telling her story for fear of social disapproval. "She was even reluctant to say her name in the beginning," says Salamah. But eventually she opened up: "Her husband was addicted to drugs and had lost all his senses."

Amal says "I have lived such horrors that I feel I'm

not a human anymore. I suffered torment for a long time, and was subjected to psychological and physical torture. I even no longer know whether I am divorced or married because of the many times my husband swore to divorce me.”

Moreover, her husband stole her savings, her gold, and any assistance she received from her family so he could buy drugs. His aggression was not limited to his wife, but included the children that he took hostage for extortion and as a means to put pressure on the mother. “He did not hesitate to abuse his children, especially the girls, with beating, sexual harassment, including his eldest daughter, even after her marriage,” says Amal.

Lawyers in the clinic examined Amal’s legal papers and medical reports and submitted a request to the courts to give her the custody of her children, on the basis that the father could not be trusted with his children. At the same time, the lawyers asked the judges and the traditional mediators to take up her case with the welfare authorities - to provide protection to her, and get the children into her custody. The lawyers told the Department of Social Protection that the lives of Amal and her children were in danger.

After many rounds of negotiation and visits between the ministry, traditional mediators, and the lawyers, the ministry agreed to provide Amal with 800 NIS (\$200) monthly.

The lawyers also noticed that Amal and her children need psycho-social support because of what they had experienced. The lawyers coordinated with partner organizations and referred the case to one of them. Weekly psycho-social support sessions were held for them, and their mental health started to improve, and the children’s performance at school recovered.

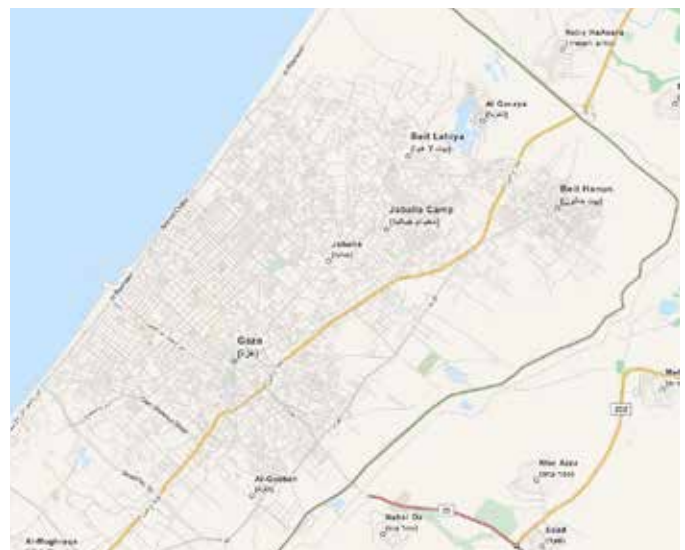
For Amal, the lawyers contacted a women’s organization that provided vocational and crafts training for her to start to generate a small income of her own, which helped improve their living conditions. After she got divorced, she was

also able to get an identity card, and that enabled her to receive food and other assistance from organizations who were unable to assist her directly when she was still registered in the name of her husband.

“Amal and her children are not the only victims of violence and injustice, but they are one of the few who were able to stop it and start a new life,” says Salamah. “This was all possible after the intervention of Awn Network, which is funded by UNDP, and provides services to marginalized and vulnerable groups.” Around 88 per cent of the Awn Network’s clients are women.

Access to Justice, like everything from water to unemployment, is affected by the Israeli occupation and intra-Palestinians conflict. After fighting between Hamas and Fateh Palestinian parties, there had been lack of independent and affordable legal services provided in Gaza. The public’s confidence in the rule of law declined and court delays are interminable. The siege and the blockade also means ordinary people don’t have the fees to access justice through lawyers.

The Palestinian Bar Association established the Awn Access to justice network with 25 local CBOs and NGOs. It simplifies legal language to make it easier to understand, provides legal awareness to



Jabalyia Refugee Camp, in the north of the Gaza Strip, is one of the most overcrowded spots on earth.

both ordinary people and to academics, doctors, teachers, and students. It has launched mobile legal aid clinics to give access to justice to vulnerable people in their home neighbourhoods. It also has a project to raise the capacity and volunteer ethos of young lawyers through the mobile clinics program.

Another feature of the Awn Network is the use

the informal justice system, using tribal elders and local *mukhtars*, or community leaders, provide faster and more cost-effective ways to resolve disputes.

It also has a specialised gender justice council dedicated to improving women's access to the empowerment of women.



AWN Access to Justice Network's mobile legal aid clinics teams operate in areas that have seen repeated destruction during Gaza's many cycles of conflict.

Key Lessons

- 1 Work to build a network of NGOs and community-based organizations to ensure there is no duplication of the services being provided to beneficiaries and to ensure confidence by the people in the service providers.
- 2 Spend time establishing a referral system that is able to use internal staff and external partners to enable services to penetrate difficult-to-reach populations.
- 3 Establish a legal aid database and case management system that allows you to analyse the kinds of cases and outcomes the justice providers are able to provide to beneficiaries - this assists with advocacy and fund-raising.
- 4 Use a mobile legal aid clinic to reach people in their local spaces - particularly vulnerable populations, such as women in refugee camps and remote areas, who face social pressure in trying to access centralised justice services.