

8 March 2019 – Millions of women in the Eastern Mediterranean Region continue to be affected by years of war, displacement, and poverty. The conditions these women face everyday are extremely harsh. From losing their husbands and children, to fleeing their homes and struggling to find safe shelter, their journeys are filled with severe hardship. As conflict continues unabated, women remain remarkably resilient and strong. On the occasion of the International Women's Day, we show a few examples of these brave women surviving in emergency contexts.

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Murjan is a senior nurse with a mobile clinic that provides mammography services to women in the West Bank villages in the occupied Palestinian territory. It often takes her a few hours, if possible at all, to reach some of the areas – and not just because of the remoteness. Over 100 fixed and over 2000 “flying” Israeli checkpoints hamper free movement within the West Bank, including for ambulances and mobile health clinics. “In spite of all the difficulties we face daily in our job, I do not despair. I am a firm believer in what we do, and every time we successfully reach one more village to explain the importance of breast check-ups to women and provide our services, I know it is worth the effort.”

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Hanan Ahmed Mohammed has been working as a gynecological surgeon in Al Kuwait hospital for 8 years and continues to work tirelessly to ease the pain of patients seeking medical care at the hospital. Hanan receives incentives as part of WHO's support to the hospital. This allows

her to provide for her family and lead a dignified life.

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Safia Mustafa has been working as a janitor at Kuwait hospital for 35 years. She supports her family of 7 and her grandchildren. Sometimes, they can only afford to eat one meal a day. It is a struggle, but she chooses to continue working to make ends meet, despite her age and deteriorating health.

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Fifty-year-old Wadha, a widow and mother of 8 children, has travelled hundreds of kilometres from Al-Hasakeh governorate in north-east Syria to Damascus in search of health care that is not available in her home town. She is suffering from severe pain in her chest, back and kidneys. Since the death of her husband, she has been raising her children and managing the family's small farm on her own. "Having to be both mother and father is never easy, and harvesting the crops on my own is exhausting. And of course the war has made everything worse," says Wadha. "But I have to go on, for the sake of my children. Many of the women in my village have lost sons and husbands, but we carry on. We can't give up."

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Doctor Saba, an obstetrician and gynecologist, works with Heevie nongovernmental organization, one of WHO's implementing partners in Dahuk governorate. She is very passionate about women's health issues. "Because I fled from my home in Mosul and saw first-hand the havoc that war causes, I am reminded that kindness and empathy are fundamental characteristics that an obstetrician and gynecologist should possess."

Doctor Saba works with a team of male health professionals to deliver healthcare to the Yazidi community in Zumar sub-district, Talafar District. More often than not, women prefer to consult with her because she is female. "The female patients feel comfortable with me. I examine, treat and counsel every patient that comes to me. I know what happened during the war and how this has left many people traumatized."

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"I am lucky to have this job and have the support of my family to work. If I didn't have this job, how would I pay for rent, and how would I support my 5 children?" said Asima Raoufi, a senior nurse at the Burn Centre in Istiqlal Hospital in Kabul.

The Burn Centre at Istiqlal is the biggest in the country, and Asima has been working there for 15 years. Asima looks after burn patients on a daily basis, and provides care starting from primary emergency care to day-to-day care for high grade burn patients. However, she says they often face many shortages in equipment and supplies. Asima feels empowered and independent because of her work, serving her people and supporting her family. She is well respected by friends, families and relatives who get her support and attention whenever they visit the hospital.

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