



Expert Group Meeting on “Impact of Occupation on Human Development in Palestine: Challenges, Needs and Remedies Towards Sustainable Human Development”

Kempinsky Hotel , Amman, 20 -21 July 2017

“This occupation has imposed a heavy humanitarian and development burden on the Palestinian people. Among them are generation after generation of Palestinians who have been compelled to grow-up and live in ever more crowded refugee camps, many in abject poverty, and with little or no prospect of a better life for their children.”

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Tehran, 5 June 2017

This Expert Group Meeting (EGM) has two main objectives; the first is descriptive as it involves the observation, measurement and assessment of the impact of the Israeli occupation on Sustainable Human Development in Palestine. This includes the study of the ever-expanding list of challenges Palestinians face because of the unending Israeli occupation. Such challenges vary from the restrictions of housing, water provision, agriculture, industry, finance, trade, freedom of movement and travel, to freedom of expression, political organization, and the right of return and self-determination. Each one of these challenges pertaining to one aspect of human life has dire spillover effects over the other aspects. The process of observing, measuring and assessing therefore is complex and multifaceted but necessary if suitable mitigation policies as well as programmes are to be construed.

The other category of objectives is prescriptive as it involves seeking remedies to counter the challenges described in the first category. This is in turn two pronged; on the one hand, it is a series of studies pertaining to state building, independence and international support and recognition. And on the other it involves out-of-the box solutions to confront or circumvent the obstacles resulting from Israeli occupation and mitigate their effect on development outcomes, including the attainment of the 2030 Development Agenda. These remedies are theme based, so there shall be sessions to discuss remedies pertaining to each one of the challenges described. Each session is expected to result in recommendations that will serve to articulate a future research agenda, the gist of which will be geared towards supporting policies and programmes that enhance Palestinian human development, while placing Palestine on a better footing to reach the SDGs. The overall nature of this meeting is therefore forward-looking, exploring what options there are to address the current problems.

Thus, the EGM shall provide a platform to assess and enhance Palestinian human capital and sustainable development, including the attainment of the 2030 Development Agenda. To this end, it is as much an imperative to explore the challenges facing human development in Palestine in the context of good governance and the performance of the relevant Palestinian institutions, including CSOs, as in the context of the Israeli occupation and its consequences.

Finally, the recommendations this meeting is expected to provide should include follow up plans that address the needs and mitigate the challenges facing sustainable human development in Palestine.

Tentative Annotated Agenda

Day I: Thursday, 20 July 2017

09:00 – 09:30 Registration

09:30 – 09:45 Opening Remarks

09:45 – 11:45 **Session I: The Challenges of a More Effective Essential Service Delivery and Sustainable Development in Palestine: What are the Options?**

For 50 years, essential service delivery in Palestine has been severely hindered by Israeli occupation. Even after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the de-facto severance of Jerusalem from the rest of Palestine, the division of the West Bank into different zones, the siege against Gaza, the frequent closures, and incursions by the Israeli army and Israeli settlers, have made it near impossible for Palestinians to equitably have access to essential services, or to achieve substantial progress in the way of attaining any of the sustainable development goals, whether economic or political). This, in turn, increased inefficiencies and vulnerability to health services, education or water and sanitation, food insecurity and resulted in aid dependency in several areas in the occupied territory. Among the questions the session will address are the following:

- What are the socio-economic repercussions, whether quantifiable or not, of an obstructed and possibly inefficient essential service delivery system? How does such a state of affairs affect the emergence of effective essential service institutions as well as their equitable accessibility by the general population? How are the SDGs affected?
- Can Palestinians still organize essential service delivery systems differently despite the hindrances poised by the occupation? Can corruption and other inefficiencies be addressed at the central or local levels? How can decision making on development priorities become more responsive and participatory to the public? How can SDG 16 framework be utilized to enhance Palestinian institutions?
- Can modern communication technologies provide a solution? Do traditional, organic forms of socio-political organization function efficiently when compare to modern institutions under the exceptional pressure of occupation?

Chairperson:

Mr. Rafat Soboh , First Economic officer, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division, UN-ESCWA

Speakers:

Mr. Tawfiq Bdeiri, General Manager, Municipal Development and Lending Fund, Palestine.

Mr. Hans Frühauf, Manager of the Local Governance Reform Program GIZ (Germany) in Palestine .

Mr. Zaghoul Samhan, Director General, Policies and Planning, Environment Quality Authority, Palestine.

11:45 – 12:00 Coffee Break

12:00 – 14:00 **Session II: The Impact of Movement Restrictions on Development Outcomes in Palestine: What Mitigation Possibilities are Currently Feasible:**

The closure, the construction of a ‘barrier’ and checkpoints, the restrictions on freedom of movement, and the use of force by Israel in the so-called access restricted areas continues to undermine basic human rights and the development prospects of the Palestinians. As a matter of fact, forty-four per cent of West Bank land is off-limits to Palestinian construction and development. Throughout 2016, the Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip remained closed, except for 44 days (compared to 33 in 2015). As part of its closure policy, Israel imposes restrictions on access to land and maritime areas of the Strip. Obviously, Israeli measures have undermined Palestinian access to their land, natural resources. It has curtailed their access to essential services, has exacerbated poverty, unemployment and aid dependency. Among the questions the session will address are the following:

- What is the impact of movement restrictions and access denial on Palestinian development outcomes? Including the freedom of movements of the people living and working at the number of enclaves (e.g. Barta’a) and the villages and towns near the military zones and settlements (e.g. Tyaseer, Jordan valley, Iskarya)?
- What is the impact of the restrictions of movements (and delays) on the movement between neighboring countries (Jordan and Egypt) and Palestine?
- How is the Palestinian economy shrinking as a result? What is the impact on social dynamics?
- What is the impact of delays and restrictions on Palestinian human capital? What can be done to mitigate the impact of movement restrictions on Palestinian human development?
- What are the Palestinian options to mitigate the impact of restricting the movement of goods and people? What are the options in developing and investing in different services or industry that are not too much affected to Israeli restrictions?

Chairperson:

Ms. Lamis Deek , Attorney and Human Rights Advocate at Lamis Deek Law Firm, USA.

Speakers:

Mr. Jamil Hilal, Professor, Birzeit University and Board Member of Majalla al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, Palestine.

Mr. Jad Isaac, Director of Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ), Palestine.

Mr. Shawkat Sarsour, Director, Consultant & Development Expert at Al-Sahel Consultancy firm, Palestine.

14:00 – 15:00 Lunch break

15:00 – 17:00 **Session III: Arresting the Shrinking Palestinian Economy and Mitigating Dependency on Israel: Challenges and Alternatives.**

The Palestinian economy is governed by different domestic and significant exogenous factors. The economy is a hostage to Israeli actions and policies. An economy, of which more than 98 % of the MSMEs and mostly family businesses, is very vulnerable to additional costs due to Israel or macroeconomic volatility. Palestine also exhibits a high level of unemployed among youth. While the school enrollment rate is among the highest around the globe, however, there appears to be a disconnect between education and labor market demand, in addition to the fact that the Palestinian economy is unable to produce sufficient jobs.

- What options can be developed to support the Palestinian economy and make it more resilient from exogenous factors?
- Which alternative business models are available to protect the Palestinian consumers and producers from the failed markets?
- What are the practical plans to tackle the growing youth unemployment rate?
- What is the capacity of the Palestinian economy to grow in the productive sectors (industry and agriculture)?
- What are the short- and medium- term strategies for food security and control the volatility of the prices of crucial food and agriculture product (i.e. meat products)?
- What regional cooperation mechanisms could be developed to boost the Palestinian economy?

Chairperson:

Mr. Samir Abdallah, Former Minister of Planning and former Minister of Labor, Palestine; Assistant professor and Senior Economist by MAS, Palestine.

Speakers:

Mr. Naser Abdelkarim, Professor of Financial Economics at the graduate School of the Arab American University, Palestine.

Mr. Michele Di Maio, Professor, University of Naples, Italy.

End of Day 1

Day II: Friday, 21 July 2017

09:00 – 11:45 **Session IV: The Gaza Strip and Jerusalem: Between Closure and Restrictions**

The situation in Gaza is deteriorating. The closures of Gaza, internal Palestinian discord, together with successive Israeli offensives, have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, severely undermining any effort at development and resulting in recurrent violations of human rights. The closures have a negative impact on the availability of essential services, exacerbating poverty and aid dependency. Access to health, education and broader economic and social rights are restricted. Food is lacking, medicines and medical supply is short, drinking water is increasingly becoming a serious issue, schools and hospitals are not able to function in their full capacity, with frequent electrical power outages.

In East Jerusalem, although hundreds of small-scale plans were approved for Palestinians in recent years, there is inadequate planning for future improvement on a large scale that is necessary to address public needs. Hundreds of Palestinian families are at risk of forced eviction in East Jerusalem owing to the seizure of buildings by Israeli settlers in Silwan and the Old City, as well as to various parks and tourism sites being developed by the Israeli authorities.

Gaza

- What are the alternatives for purification of the drinking water? Which are feasible?
- What are the alternatives for energy production (i.e. Solar energy cells)?
- How to overcome the challenges related to food security and agricultural production?
- Are there economic empowerment projects and cooperatives as an alternative business model?

Jerusalem

- What are the options for Palestinians residing in Jerusalem?
- Do innovations in technology and design provide mitigation options?
- How can CSOs and traditional, cultural and religious networks be supported?

Chairperson:

Mr. Omar Shaban Director, PalThink for Strategic Studies, Gaza, Palestine.

Speakers:

Mr. Khalil Toufakji, Manager, Maps Department and GIS at Arab Studies Society Jerusalem, Palestine.

Mr. Rafat Soboh, First Economic officer, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division, UN-ESCWA

11:30 – 11:45 Coffee Break

11:45 – 13:45

Session V: Arresting Human Capital Deterioration of Palestinian Refugees: What are the Options?

The plight of Palestinian refugees has been the core of the Palestinian cause. The forced displacement of an entire population and its replacement by another is a wrong that has not been righted for seventy years. Of the 5 million or more Palestinian refugees, one third live inside 58 recognized refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank. Socioeconomic conditions in these camps are generally poor, with high population density, cramped living conditions and inadequate basic infrastructure such as roads and sewers. Their Right of return has been denied by Israel.

- What are the alternatives for the livelihood of the refugees in Syria and Lebanon?
- What are the options for the refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank?
- The Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria or that are internally displaced within Syria, what are the prospects in the aftermath of the conflict?
- What can be done to support UNRWA? What alternatives are there should its services be curtailed as availability of funds decrease?
- How can the living conditions of refugee camps be improved, despite the political sensitivities and economic challenges of host countries?
- What are the options to protect the Palestinian Refugees' right of return?
- What are the probabilities of another Palestinian Refugee crisis and what are the options to preempt it?

Chairperson:

Mr. Tamim Al-Bargouti, Head of the Palestine Unit, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division, UN-ESCWA

Speakers:

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya, Policy and Reform Unit, Office of the Prime Minister, Palestine.

Mr. Youssef Courbage, Senior Researcher at the Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques (INED), France.

Ms. Lamis Deek, Attorney and Human Rights Advocate at Lamis Deek Law Firm, USA.

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13:45 - 14:45

Lunch Break

14:45 - 16:00

Open Debate and Way Forward

16:00 - 16:45

Closing Session