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## **MAKING IMPACT A PRIORITY**

This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report issued by the Arab Thought Forum. Notwithstanding, this is the first annual report to be presented to the public, and the first published in English. In recent years, ATF issued brochures and newsletters to publicize its activities and to make up for the limited distribution of annual reports. Although good objectives have been achieved in this way, it seems to be insufficient. Modern trend favors the issuing of annual reports, available to all, and this report follows the trend.

As the first available to the public, the report includes information about ATF in addition to the annual activities which cover the period April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999. This period presents a problem; for the last few years, ATF's budget has covered the period until the end of March. At present, our fiscal year complies with the calendar year. Sometime in the future, amendments will take place so that the annual report covers the period of the annual budget.

ATF will try in this report to give a picture of its activities. We believe in the principle that promotion ought to be balanced, reflecting achievements in an accurate and honest way. We do not believe in either exaggeration or slackness. An annual report should be a true reflection of the organization and its activities; this is what we have aimed for. Nonetheless, it might be impossible to reflect all interesting and rich details and dynamics, sadness after frustration and happiness after success, which accompanies implementation.

Furthermore, it is easy to present an activity although it is difficult to convey its impact, which is a continuous process, not necessarily noticed during the same year. What we want to explain here is that activities implemented by ATF are planned in principle to serve the goal and impact; the activity in itself is not an end but a means to an end.

As for the impact, some indicators may be noticed, such as the ratio and quality of participation, which expresses the credibility of the organization. Moreover, there are verbal and written contacts received as comments or responses, media reaction, coverage of activities and assigning a space for presenting and discussing activities. More important, a change in attitude may be observed from time to time and executive decisions are taken as a result of these activities.

ATF is proud of having several indicators of this kind, which are dealt with as motivation for focusing on quality. In this connection, ATF would like to extend its thanks and deep appreciation to all Multaqa friends, who believed in its credibility and participated in efforts, discussions, analysis, advice and funding, without which ATF would not have been able to accomplish its programs.

Special thanks goes to ATF's family: members of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee and in particular ATF staff, whose commitment and dedication made it possible to lead the vehicle so easily and smoothly.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah  
President

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Arab Thought Forum believes that the building of Palestinian civil society is a fundamental requirement of statehood and that Palestinian people should be helped to play their role as active participants in the democratic process. ATF is also committed to the belief that state structures must be developed to serve and be responsive to an active and critical public, which is conscious not only of its obligations and duties, but also of its rights and entitlements. Thus, our mission is to:

***Promote awareness of Palestinian development needs by influencing the Palestinian public discourse on cutting-edge issues of societal development.***

## **BACKGROUND**

The Arab Thought Forum (Al Multaqa or ATF) was established in Jerusalem in 1977 as an independent Palestinian institution. It is not affiliated to any government, political party or organization. It is a democratic, open forum for Palestinian decision-makers and public opinion leaders. Its strength lies in its political independence, which allows it to broach a broad range of subjects related to the Palestinian cause.

As one of the leading Palestinian organizations specializing in socio-economic development, ATF has served for two decades as an important platform for the presentation of development strategies of Palestinian nation building. Initially focused on scientific studies and research, ATF now works more as a “think tank” dedicated to identifying critical issues for analysis and public debate in order to influence the development of the Palestinian people.

Thus the main thrust of ATF’s work became to influence and shape the thinking of policy makers. In this regard we have been successful through creating good links with the Palestinian National Authority and with Palestinian intellectuals. ATF was able, through such links to contribute to debates on the new Palestinian Authority Constitution and Draft Law. Furthermore, ATF has been able to quickly respond to the challenges of hot issues requiring public debate and a well-considered policy response.

Following the signing of the Oslo Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Israeli Government in 1993, the Palestinians were placed at the threshold of realizing their struggle for freedom, independence and prosperity. Realizing the importance of sound economic and democratic development and formation at this crucial threshold, the ATF began in 1994 to work on redefining its strategies and philosophy to correspond with these changes in Palestinian society. ATF’s work focus after 1994 may be summarized under the following three main categories:

- **The Future of Jerusalem**
- **Democratic Process and Nation Building**
- **Promoting Development Awareness**

## **MANAGEMENT**

ATF is committed to democracy and a democratic society. For ATF, democracy begins at home. It possesses built-in democratic structures at all levels of the organization. Open advertisement of jobs and competitive selections enables it to upgrade its performance and introduce fresh blood and new ideas.

The policy of the organization is set by the Board of Trustees, which is composed of 25 to 40 intellectuals. An Executive Committee is formed of seven members including the President, two Vice Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer and members without portfolio. The Board of Trustees elects all posts for a two-year period. The Board of Trustees consists of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Reporter. A Monitoring Committee is formed from the Board of Trustees to make a follow-up to the administrative and financial affairs of the organization.

ATF's president supervises the overall activities of the organization. ATF's staff consists of 18 full time staff members in addition to several consultants.

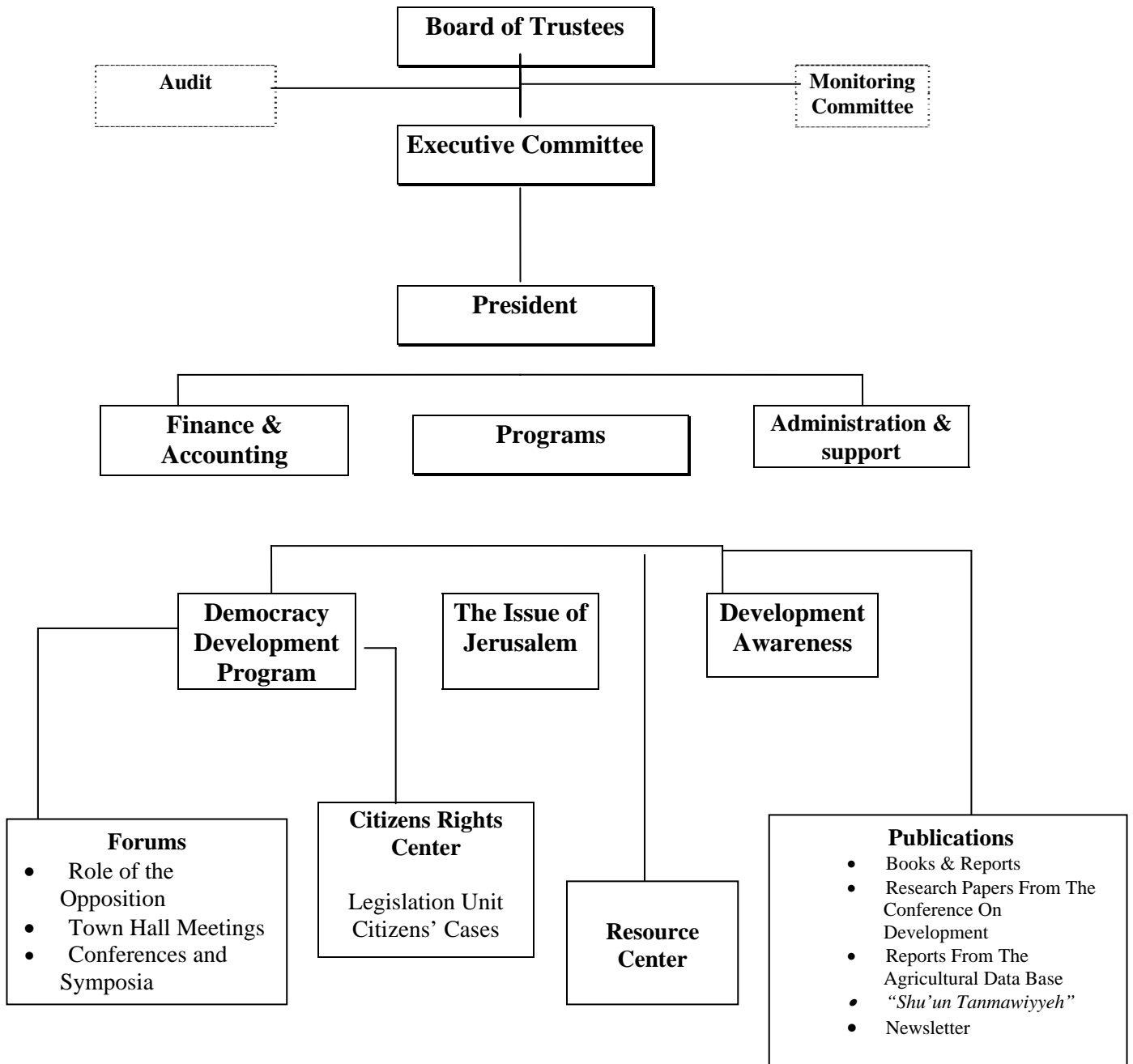
### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Several components are used to monitor ATF's activities. In addition to a Monitoring Committee, a separate computerized evaluation system is used to measure the performance of the activities and their impact. The monitoring and evaluation system tracks and analyzes all activities and indicators. ATF also maintains a computerized accounting and financial reporting system, in addition to a baseline data system to assist in carrying out regular periodic reporting. Over the last 22 years, ATF has maintained a disciplined tradition of conducting annual meetings for the Board of Trustees, monthly meetings of the Board of Directors and weekly staff meetings, in addition to specialized meetings for certain tasks or specialized committees. Finally, all funded activities are monitored jointly with the donor organization, through both periodic reporting and evaluation sessions.

### **Financial Management and Accountability**

ATF possesses the experience and management skills to financially administer its projects. ATF's computerized accounting system produces the required financial reports. Furthermore, ATF accounts are audited annually by *Ernest and Young International* and regularly supervised by **Arthur Andersen & Co.**

## Organizational Structure



## Board of Trustees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Joined</b>
Abdel Karim Ashour	1993
Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah	1982
Abdel Rahman Natsheh	1993
Adnan Shuqeir	1986
Albert Agazerian	1977
Daoud Istanbuli	1977
Haidar Abdel Shafi	1978
Husam Bader	1978
Ilham Abu Gazaleh	1996
Ismat Shakhshir	1986
Issam Awad	1993
Jad Ishaq	1986
Jerjes Al Khouri	1978
Ma'amoun Assayyed	1978
Mahdi Abdel Hadi	1977
Mamdouh Al 'Eker	1993
Mohammed Abbas Abdel Haq	1982
Mohammed Omar Yousef	1996
Mukarram Qasrawi	1996
Nabil Tarazi	1993
Omar Gaiadeh	1996
Rafiq Hussein	1996
Rawya Shawa	1993
Sa'id Hussein	1977
Salah Saqqa	1993
Samar Nather	1996
Samir Hulleileh	1996
Sumayya Naser	1986
Taher Nammari	1996
Walid Mustafa	1996

In total, 60 intellectuals have served as members of the Board of Trustees during the last 22 years. The continuous introduction of new members brings a fresh outlook and creativity to the organization. The current board consists of thirty members, who have joined ATF in six waves, 13% in 1977 and 1998 respectively, 8% in 1982, 10% in 1986, 23% in 1993 and finally 33% in 1996. In its next meeting in July, the board is expected to elect between 5-10 new members.

## **Executive Committee (Board of Directors)**

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafeh	<b>President</b>
Mohammed Abbas Abdel Haq	<b>First Deputy</b>
Salah Saqa	<b>Second Deputy</b>
Taher Namri	<b>Secretary</b>
Sa'id Hussein	<b>Treasurer</b>
Adnan Shuqeir	<b>Member</b>
Ismat Shakhshir	<b>Member</b>

## **Board of Trustees Executive Bureau**

Jeries Al Khouri	<b>Chairman</b>
Walid Mustafa	<b>Deputy</b>
Daoud Istanbuli	<b>Reporter</b>
Abdel Rahman Natsheh	<b>Monitoring Committee</b>

## **Staff**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Title</b>
Abdel Rahman Abu Arafeh	President
Ziad Abdallah	Program Manager
Mohammed Omar Yousef	Financial Consultant
Ahmad Rwaidy	Legal Officer
Najat Amro	Legislation Officer
Ahmad Siam	Coordinator
Hilda Sabbah	Information Officer
Kathleen Ridolfo	Programs Assistant
Adnan Abu Ghosh	Administration Assistant
Naser Ya'qoub	Field Researcher
Suheil Khalilieh	Field Researcher
Yousef Jubran	Accountant
Na'ela Razem	Secretary
Vida Tango	Secretary
Laurette Khayo	Secretary
Najah Qassas	Assistant
Hazem Abdel Qader	Assistant



## **Funding Partners**

As a non-governmental and non-profit organization, ATF believes in the importance of securing a broad funding base in order to achieve greater financial security and maintain intellectual independence.

Since its establishment in 1977, ATF has cooperated with a number of local and international organizations in implementing its programs. Both its capital funding and program-linked expenditure has come from grants through a variety of organizations and institutions.

ATF has a strong network of friendly and professional relations and enjoys credibility among local and international organizations. Currently, It is implementing a comprehensive program Democracy Development funded by USAID.

Following is a list of ATF funding partners over the last 10 years:

*American Mid-East Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST) - USA*  
*American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) - USA*  
*Canada Fund - Canada*  
*Commission of the European Communities (EC) - Europe*  
*Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (SPD) - Germany*  
*Friedrich Naumann Stiftung - Germany*  
*International Institute for Applied Social Sciences (FAFO) - Norway*  
*Netherlands Organization for International Development (NOVIB) - Holland*  
*Nord Sud, The Austrian North-South Institute for Development Cooperation -- Austria*  
*Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development (EZE) - Germany*  
*Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) - Switzerland*  
*United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*  
*United States Agency for International Development (USAID) - USA*

## **Affiliations**

ATF is Proud to actively participate in several Palestinian umbrella organizations, including:

*Council for Palestinian Human Rights*  
*The Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace*  
*The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Network (PNGO)*  
*The Union of Charitable Societies*

## **PROGRAMS**

ATF sees democracy as “a comprehensive status” involving the whole society, from the individual to the highest levels of leadership. It strongly believes that the democratic experience cannot be judged from a one sided perspective; the entire society must be participatory and committed to democratic practices. ATF aspires to promote participatory approach to democracy by being a forum for a variety of issues affecting the public such as public policies and evaluations of the impacts of emerging official policies. Other democratic practices and human rights issues are also of major emphasis, including free speech and the constructive role of the opposition in providing feedback to the decision making process.

ATF is committed to the goal of establishing an independent democratic state for the Palestinian people. With the negotiations on the final status still pending, ATF has become a discussion forum for a variety of issues including settlements, borders, Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

The Dynamic nature of Palestinian/Israeli relations demands a flexible approach when determining the most appropriate strategies for achieving long-term aims and objectives. In the past, the approach of ATF was to address public policy issues only, traditionally the intellectual property of the minority and relatively inaccessible to the majority.

## **Democracy Understanding and Development Program**

The Arab Thought Forum aspired to continue with its mission of contributing to the shaping of democratization process in Palestine, through the establishment and implementation of the Democracy, Understanding and Development Program.

Long before the establishment of this Program, ATF encouraged, supported and directly intervened in the democratic process. Now, the organization has taken the lead in monitoring, advocating and nurturing this process.

The Program, which commenced in April 1997 with the support of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), demonstrates ATF's commitment to the goal of establishing an independent democratic state for the Palestinian people. ATF views the building of Palestinian civil society as necessary to establish a foundation for a representative and responsive government and political structure.

The Program is designed to engage the Palestinian people in the democratic process with the intention of increasing the participation of civil society in public decision making.

In order to achieve the above, the program initiated various activities including a series of forums composed of town hall meetings, conferences and opposition meetings throughout Palestine. The Citizen Rights Center was also established to directly support citizens in the event of conflict with local or national government.

## **The Peace Process**

The 1992 Oslo Agreement was a milestone in the history of the Palestinian people. On the one hand, it allowed the Palestinian people for the first time, to start down a political road, which could lead them to establish an independent Palestinian state. At the same time, they started from the zero point efforts to build an infrastructure of a national authority which is necessary for the establishment of a real state in the political, social and economic spheres.

Among the first steps was the launching of the first Palestinian presidential and legislative elections. These were considered as the beginning of a democratic process which would lead to develop the Palestinian political infrastructure so that it will become a modern political system governed by the principles of justice and the rule of law.

The political road was not easy. The agreements signed with the Israeli authorities were obstructed. In addition, efforts to build our institutions and guarantee separation of authorities through the principle of the rule of law faced various obstacles because of internal factors and because the political process itself.

In spite of these strong impediments, it does not seem that the Palestinian people have lost their faith in the current political process even though the criticisms and frustrations are growing all the time. The views of the Palestinian people in this process, its scope and results have continuously evolved. Every stage was influenced by a group of factors and events.

As a fully independent institution, ATF was able to intervene on different levels in political and, more specifically, peace process related issues. Specifically, ATF sponsored discussion forums on important landmarks in the peace process, and kept the peace process at the forefront through the publication of various articles in its journal *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*. ATF held several meetings, for example, on the Oslo Accords outcomes, most notable was a two-day conference "*Oslo Accords: Results And Developments*" held in 1997.

Another major intervention for ATF in this regard was the research and analysis of public opinion trends based on polls conducted between 1994 and 1999 by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC).

An international conference is to be held in June 1999 "*Palestine at the Crossroads: Perspectives of Citizenship and Prospects of Identity*." The conference will provide an opportunity for an in-depth evaluation of the performance of Palestinian society since the Oslo Accords.

## **The Future of Jerusalem**

The Final Status negotiations will decide the future of Jerusalem, a city that is central to the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Palestinian advocacy considering Jerusalem the capital of the independent Palestinian State is not merely a slogan or a romantic dream. It is rather a dogmatic thesis and a goal, which Palestinians work unanimously to achieve.

In insisting on Jerusalem as the capital of the prospective Palestinian state, the Palestinians refer to a number of combined political, religious, geographical, social and economic facts. When comparing both Israeli and Palestinian stands, in the light of these facts, there will be noticeable differences which will undoubtedly give preponderance to the Palestinian demands and position.

For Palestinians, Jerusalem is the geographical center connecting transport routes between north, south and east. Moreover, it is the major cultural center for the Palestinians, hosting the major cultural institutions. Jerusalem enjoys a special place in the hearts and minds of both Christian and Muslim Palestinians, who consider Jerusalem as their eternal, spiritual and historical capital. Had it not been for Israel's obstructive measures during the past three decades, Jerusalem would have been both the economic and population center. It has in fact still the potential to become so if given the natural opportunity.

Jerusalem, particularly the Old City, is a cultural monument. It is of paramount value to all three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Jerusalem enjoys a special place in the hearts and minds of both the Christian and Muslim Palestinians, who affectionately consider it as their eternal, spiritual and historical capital.

Since 1967, Jerusalem has been subjected to a premeditated policy of Judaization. This policy of changing the Palestinian Arab character of the city was designed to create greater Israeli-Jewish dominance over the City. It was manifested in land confiscation, settlement activities, deportations, closures, isolation and economic hardship.

There is no doubt that the continuously decreasing capacity of the Arab city in providing the social and economic services to its citizens, and its ability to play the political role it should is the natural outcome of the vicious Israeli policy. This policy expresses itself more and more as a clear case of ethnic cleansing, which contravenes international law and all human rights principles.

Yet hope still exists, for in spite of these measures Jerusalem still maintains its traditional Arab Environment.

As a Jerusalem based institution, ATF has an important role to play in preparing Palestinians for the final status negotiations on the future of the city. ATF is committed to the peace process and truly believes that the issue of Jerusalem may well be the cornerstone in the achievement of just and permanent peace in the Middle East. Realizing this fact, ATF concentrates on culminating and coordinating efforts to preserve the identity of the Holy City especially against Israeli efforts to "create facts

on the ground” through ethnic cleansing and other measures. ATF concentrates on Jerusalem’s heritage and on dispelling some of the myths, which have been perpetrated on Jerusalem for political reasons. It is committed to emphasize the legal status of East Jerusalem and the cultural, national and spiritual importance of the Holy City in the minds of Palestinian people.

In this regard, ATF continues to be actively involved, in coordination with other local and international organizations, in different legal, cultural national and spiritual issues pertaining to Jerusalem. It is, furthermore, careful to advocate the issue of Jerusalem throughout most of its publications and many of its forums.

## Promoting Development Awareness

Development has been a focus of ATF's work since its inception. Due to recent dramatic changes in the Palestinian political and economic structures, ATF has crystallized its efforts to address development awareness and the need for coordination over several issues including sectoral development, nature preservation, and management of natural resources.

In this context, ATF advocates an exchange of knowledge, better cooperation and coordination among the different institutions that are actively engaged in development.

In order to facilitate this process, a number of programs, research activities and papers have been planned on the direction of development, to evaluate the performance of the institutions working in development.

As one of the leading Palestinian organizations specializing in socio-economic development, ATF has served for almost two decades as an important platform for the presentation of development strategies of Palestinian nation building. Initially focussed on scientific studies and research, ATF now works as a "think tank" dedicated to identifying critical issues for analysis and public debate in order to influence the development of the Palestinian people.

ATF has begun its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of constructive achievements in the area of promoting development awareness. Some of the activities it implemented in this regard include:

- The Conference for Development in the Service of Steadfastness. Twenty-Eight papers were presented in this first scientific discussion of Palestinian socio-economic development issues.
- A pioneer study on regional development of seven villages in the northern Jordan Valley. The study aimed to provide reliable data on socio-economic conditions in order to determine the potential for regional economic development.
- A development library and a specialized resource center that includes 4000 books of which 2000 are in English. This development resource center also includes 100 journals and periodicals, 40 of which are in English. ATF has also established an audio-visual center and electronic information center.
- ATF issues the only Palestinian development journal "*Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*" (Developmental Affairs). Eight volumes, consisting of 20 issues, have been issued. The journal contains articles in both Arabic and English.
- The Agricultural Database Project provided accurate data based on fields' surveys. This project, conducted jointly with the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees, issued 21 reports covering various field of the Palestinian agricultural sector.

- Numerous conferences and workshops were held on economic issues such as industry, tourism, housing and local government needs. Several specialized higher councils were formed between 1992-1995 as a result of ATF workshops.
- Over 100 different reports were published on various societal development issues. Although published in Arabic, excerpts were translated and published in English.
- Institutionalizing sectoral development among Palestinian institutions. This effort resulted in the emergence of joint activities and the establishment of new intuitions, as well as a special committee to address identified needs. Efforts resulted in developing venues for better coordination among NGOs.

ATF's Development Awareness Program is a symbolic continuation of ATF's focus during the eighties on economic and social development. This Program is currently not an extensive one, not only due to the lack of direct financial resources, but also because of changes in public priorities and circumstances. Specialized institutions, ministries and civil society organizations emerged, with purely economic and social concentrations. However, ATF will continue this program on a smaller scale, as a window to several substantive issues of current importance and focus.



## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

During the reporting period, 3085 persons<sup>1</sup> (308 females and 2777 males) participated in 35 ATF activities, including 104<sup>2</sup> PLC members, numerous PNA ministers and senior officials, opposition leaders and leaders of NGOs and grassroots organizations.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-eight different publications were produced and distributed.<sup>4</sup> For wider effect, all of the public activities were broadcast on AL Quds Educational TV and local TV channels.<sup>5</sup> Official Palestinian TV and local newspapers have widely covered ATF's activities.

The Citizen Rights Center received and followed up 205 citizen rights cases bringing the total number of cases handled by the center to 334. An increase of over 100% in comparison to the previous year. This is largely related to the recruitment of the two field officers who began implementing a plan to expand the geographic coverage of CRC as of last September.

The process of program monitoring and evaluation for the first year of the Program was completed during the first month of this period. This included meetings between ATF staff and the Executive Committee and various external evaluation meetings with PLC members, participants, other democracy and human rights organizations, as well as the USAID Democracy Officer.

The results of the exercise were presented in a special report to ATF's Board of Trustees during its annual meeting in June. The evaluation report identified the strengths and weaknesses and highlighted present potentials and future opportunities. It aimed to direct future ATF priorities and interventions.

As of July 1998, the cooperative agreement signed between ATF and USAID on the Democracy, Understanding and Development Program was renewed for an additional period of two years. The renewed agreement includes qualitative and quantitative expansions in program activities. This enhanced ATF's ability to implement more comprehensive interventions in an efficient manner. ATF also received USAID's feedback and approval of the Program's workplan covering the second year of the cooperative agreement. Accordingly, the procedures for the recruitment of new staff members were consummated during the months of July and August. Five members were hired, including the legislation officer, communications officer, two field workers and a secretary. In addition, ATF completed procurement of new furniture and equipment in accordance with the provisions of the renewed cooperative agreement.

In response to new programming priorities, the reporting period witnessed 8 District Meetings in Gaza. In addition, 13 town hall meetings were held in one week during the Democracy Day Campaign. This indicated the readiness of ATF to implement

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<sup>1</sup> This figure represents participants who actually record their names in the attendants' sheets.

<sup>2</sup> Several PLC members participated in more than one activity.

<sup>3</sup> For more details on names and figures, please visit our website at [www.multaqqa.org](http://www.multaqqa.org)

<sup>4</sup> For a full list of our publications, please visit ATF's website at [www.multaqqa.org](http://www.multaqqa.org)

<sup>5</sup> For a videotape copy, please contact ATF.

new program activities in a professional manner within a strict time frame. It also demonstrated ATF's ability to adapt to a new programming environment including cooperation with a newly established local NGO in Gaza.

## **Programming Environment**

The reporting period did not witness any meaningful positive development on either of the political and economic spheres. In particular, lack of progress in the peace process was negatively reflected in the Palestinian position on the future of the peace process. It is true that people didn't lose hope in the process. The escalation in their political and economic hardship however, paved the way for the feelings of mistrust and despair. This was most evident to ATF by opinions expressed during Town Hall meetings. This was complicated by the fact that institutionalization of democratic structures and practices on the internal state-building level was not given due attention by the PNA.

## **The Political Environment**

The Israeli Government maintained a policy of indifference towards furthering the peace process. The Palestinian leadership on the other hand, unable to deliver tangible political or economic results, opted to use the declaration of a Palestinian state in May 1999 as a final bargaining strategy. The goal was to induce the USA and European Union to support such a step in the future if the declaration of the state was postponed upon their request.

The signing of the "Wye Agreement" brought some hope in moving the peace process forward. Particularly, with the opening of the Gaza International Airport and the release of some prisoners. This rise in optimism came despite the fact that the agreement was loaded with security conditions that had severe implications on the status of the rule of law in Palestine and constituted a threat to Palestinian national unity.

The Israeli Government did not waste any time. It quickly returned to its old policies of indifference towards the need to move ahead in the peace process, in the sake of gaining the support of the right wing extremist electorate. Consequently, The implementation of the Wye Agreement was frozen till further Israeli notice.

The historic visit of the American President last year managed to provide an atmosphere of a better future for the peace process. The road to hope has proven to be extremely long however, with the decision of the same President while in Palestine to strike Iraq. The move came as a striking example not only to Palestinians but also to simple Arab citizens. It requires little effort to realize that when it comes to the will for peace by the new world order, a different set of rules apply to Israel who can manipulate the aspirations and lives of the Palestinians without any fear of real pressure from the "democratic" western world.

Once again, American foreign policy became the target of people's anger. Major Palestinian cities and many Arab capitals witnessed angry demonstrations to protest the attack on Iraq.

## **State Building Effort**

It is still difficult to point out a major positive shift in the commitment of the Executive branch of the PNA to democratic principles particularly on the rule of law and separation of power.

While anticipation and expectation regarding the long awaited cabinet reshuffle had risen in early 1998, many believed that any change in “faces” would not bring any fruitful results, if not accompanied by basic and fundamental transformation in the systems and management of governance institutions. A transformation aimed to include the ingredients of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and equality before the law.

In fact the new Palestinian cabinet (with few new faces) had received the confidence of the PLC. The same institution that few months ago has unanimously asked for the resignation of the previous cabinet for misuse of authority and corruption by some of its members. This is but another example of how deep and complicated is the dilemma facing the process of establishing true democratic principles. It is also an example of the notion that the PLC may have lost or even surrendered the most powerful democratic tool it has.

In a cruel example of how far the situation had deteriorated, we must note the painful incident when several PLC members were beaten by security personnel during a peaceful gathering for human rights activists in front of the Awadallah house in Al Bireh. The incident drew immense condemnation from civil society organizations, PLC and several PNA senior officers including the President. A high-ranking board of inquiry was established to investigate the incident. However, to this date nothing came out.

## **Developments Affecting Civil Society**

The reporting period witnessed the passing of the NGOs draft law by the PLC in the first and second readings. Many articles of the original draft law were progressively amended, following the effective and vigorous joint participation of the PNGO network and the Union of Charitable Societies. The participatory approach included attending general sessions of the PLC and meetings of PLC committees, holding workshops initiated both by NGOs and PLC, direct lobbying during discussions of the draft legislation and dedicated efforts by key PLC members and civil society leaders. In fact, many civil society organizations and PLC members have recognized this approach as a model for meaningful legislation. ATF played an important role in the process as a member of the PNGO network task force in charge of following draft legislation.

Civil society institutions also contributed with important initiatives to support the democratization process. Particularly, CSOs fill a void when opposition parties fragment. This role has been critically questioned and thoroughly analyzed. For its part, ATF played a leading role by providing a platform for a fruitful dialogue on the issue.

## **ACTIVITIES**

ATF activities were designed to serve its programs, objectives, and philosophies. ATF is careful to hold in-depth and detailed discussions about different issues of public interest through the different dialogues, brain storming sessions, conferences and seminars in which leading politicians and intellectuals participate. The public-at-large is also invited to participate and present their views through town hall meetings.

What makes these forums unique is ATF's careful follow-up on the specific recommendations resulting from these meetings. ATF also publishes the outcomes of its forums in its journal and newsletter, as well as in special reports.

**Forums:** *ATF's Discussion Mechanisms*

ATF initiated a group of discussion activities aiming to provide a democratic forum to all levels of Palestinian decision-makers, including Palestinian National Authority officials. To date, more than 20 ministers, 70 Parliament members and hundreds of political opposition leaders and academics have participated in ATF's activities. Critical issues are discussed and analyzed in these forums, while findings and important recommendations are disseminated to all concerned parties.

ATF forums include the following three main techniques:

- **Conferences and Symposia**
- **Town Hall Meetings**
- **Dialogues on the Role of the Opposition**

### **Conferences, Workshops and Symposia**

To further achieve ATF's dedication and commitment to a participatory Palestinian democratic society, various conferences, workshops, meetings and symposia were initiated in Jerusalem and the principal districts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The main objective behind these meetings is to encourage debate, solicit opinions and support the democratic process by encouraging transparency and accountability in the government and the involvement of all segments of the society. ATF designed meetings to attract the maximum participation from the Palestinian leadership and public. The main principle behind these meetings is to put to action sought after concepts by demonstrating the benefits of actual involvement in the democratic process.

## Conference on Local Government Elections

The conference was held in Jericho on May 30, 1998, and was attended by 187 persons (9 females and 178 males) including representatives of local governments, senior public figures, leaders of political factions including the opposition. In addition, a number of PLC members, senior PNA officers and representatives of some donor countries, the media and NGOs working in development and democracy attended. Keynote speakers included *Jamil Nasir*, Governor of Jerusalem District; *Walid Abu Mweis*, Mayor of Jenin and Deputy Chairperson of the Palestinian Municipal Union; *Abdil Karim Seder*, Mayor of Jericho; *Husein Al A'raj*, Under Secretary, Ministry of Local Governments; PLC members *Dalal Salameh* and *Azmi Al Shuaiby*; and *Hasan Abu Libdeh*, Director, Palestinian Department of Statistics. Dr. *Saeb Erekat*, who was to give the keynote address, canceled his participation at the last minute due to his urgent departure abroad with President Arafat.

**Objectives** To provide an overview of the implications of postponed elections on the democratization process in Palestine. Additionally, the conference served as a proper venue to suggest possible answers to the questions on how and when to hold elections. The participation of key representatives served to emphasize the practice of citizen participation in issues affecting their civic well being.

A special report on the event, including final recommendations, was circulated to all concerned governmental and non-governmental bodies. The two major recommendations were: first, to hold the elections at stages starting with local communities in area A, then move to any other liberated area. This procedure will on the one hand facilitate the democratization process started in January 1996, with the elections for the PLC and the President. On the other hand it will guard against any Israeli intervention in the elections process. An issue always raised by the Ministry of Local Government to justify indefinite postponement of local elections. Second, on the status of Jerusalem, participants called on the PLC to draft legislation on the special status of Jerusalem as the future capital of Palestine. The legislation would allow for postponement of local elections in the city at this interim stage.

The report received very positive feedback. In particular Mr. Fahkri Shaqourah, Chairperson of the PLC Committee on the Interior and Security, asked ATF to help the committee draft legislation on the status of Jerusalem. The Governor of Jerusalem and the Minister of Local Government have both indicated that the President was examining the conference's recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Information on previous forums is available at [www.multaqa.org](http://www.multaqa.org)



## **Public Debate: The Role of the Attorney General in the Democratization Process**

The debate was held on June 23, 1998 and attended by 46 persons (10 females and 36 males), including representatives of the judiciary system, senior public figures, PLC members, senior PNA officers, including high ranking security officers, and representatives of the media and NGOs working in human rights and democracy. Keynote speakers included PLC members *Rawya Al Shawa* and *Nahid Al Rayyes*; *Uthman Al Takrury*, Professor of Law, Al Quds University; *Mursey Hujeir*, lawyer; and *Ghazi Atrah*, Judge at Ramallah Court.

**Objectives** To draw attention to the present crisis following the resignation of the appointed Attorney General and the following implications on democracy and the rule of law in Palestine.

A special report on the event, including attendant's recommendations was sent to various concerned bodies in the PNA and civil society institutions. The recommendations called on the Executive Authority to join efforts with the PLC to solve this crisis, to pass the Basic Law and to facilitate the adoption of the draft legislation on Judicial Authority that is under discussion by the PLC. ATF published a detailed report on the proceedings and recommendations.

## **Symposium: Bethlehem 2000 Project**

The symposium was held in Bethlehem, under the title "500 Days Before the Year 2000," on August 12, 1998. The meeting was attended by 68 persons (15 females and 53 males) including senior representatives of line Ministries and PNA institutions, senior public figures, a number of PLC members, representatives of donor countries, the media and NGOs working in development and democracy. Keynote speakers included *Nabil Qassis*, Minister in charge of Bethlehem 2000 Project; *Hanna Naser*, Mayor of Bethlehem; *Salah Al Ta'mary*, member of the PLC; *Hani Abu Dayyeh*, President of the Palestinian Higher Council for Tourism; *Suheil Jubran*, Deputy Mayor of Nazareth; and *Taher Al Nammary*, Researcher.

**Objectives** To provide an overview of the Bethlehem 2000 Project. To discuss means of assuring wider participation by civil society institutions in drawing the plan of action and in the implementation of the project. Additionally, the Symposia served as a proper venue to give PNA concerned bodies, active public figures, PLC members, NGOs and private sector representatives the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the preparations and readiness of the project.

The participation of Nazareth Deputy Mayor was of great value. He introduced the participatory approach adopted by his Municipality in implementing the Nazareth 2000 Project, to ensure citizen participation in all phases of the project. It was obvious that this critical factor has been absence in the case of Bethlehem 2000 Project.

A report related to the event was published in the autumn issue of ATF's Quarterly Journal.

## **Public Debate: Women's Participation in Palestinian Society**

The debate was held in Ramallah on August 13, 1998. It was attended by 49 persons (32 females and 17 males) including representatives of Women's organizations, political parties, concerned Ministries, senior public figures, a number of PLC members, and representatives of the media and NGOs working in human rights and democracy. Keynote speakers included *Intisar Al Wazir*, Minister of Social Affairs; *Zahira Kamal*, General Director, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation; *Islah Jad*, Lecturer, Bir Zeit University; *Rabiha Diab*, Fatah Movement; and *Nader Saeid*, Director, Developmental Studies Center, Bir Zeit University.

**Objectives** To outline the mechanisms necessary to facilitate the participation of women in the political and administrative spheres in Palestine. Emphasis was given to the current state of women's participation in the decision making process at the national and local levels, factors impeding their participation, and to an evaluation of women's role in the democratization process in Palestine.

A special report on the event, including attendants' recommendations was published by WATC in the biweekly news supplement of *Al Ayyam* newspaper. The recommendations called on the Executive Authority, the PLC and civil society organizations to consolidate a national plan with the goal of encouraging women's participation in the nation building process and to guarantee that future legislation will protect women rights.

With an aim to foster cooperation and coordination between civil society institutions, ATF jointly conducted the debate with the Women's Affairs Technical Committee. Both parties were satisfied with the productive mode of cooperation and with the activity's outcome.

### **Workshop: Needs and Priorities of Local Communities in the Jerusalem area**

The workshop was held in Jerusalem on September 5, 1998. Ninety-nine persons (10 females and 89 males) attended the meeting. The workshop brought together representatives of local communities; line ministries, including the personal attendance of *Rafiq Al Natsheh*, Minister of Labor and *Zuhdi Al Nashashibi*, Minister of Finance; PECDAR and other governmental agencies; *Jamil Naser*, Governor of Jerusalem; some district PLC members; *Faisal Hussein*, Minister in charge of Jerusalem affairs and local NGOs.

**Objectives** To consolidate a participatory approach in identifying needs and in planing and implementing projects in local communities deprived of essential services. It also worked to point out immediate interventions by PNA institutions in areas where urgent assistance is needed whether in infrastructure projects or in the provision of socioeconomic services.

The direct face-to-face interaction greatly facilitated the proceedings and helped to identify needs and priorities. The Minister of Finance took immediate decisions on two of the issues raised. First, he approved a salary increase for teachers working in Al Awqaf schools. Second, he approved the financing of some agricultural roads in the area.

ATF continued contact with PLC members, the Governor and the Minister in charge of Jerusalem Affairs to assess the activity and the need to hold an additional one in the future.

### **Special Study Session: the Rome Statue on the Establishment of the International Criminal Court**

The session was held at CRC on September 28, 1998, and attended by 27 persons (5 females and 22 males) including representatives of law institutions, political parties, concerned ministries, senior public figures, a number of PLC members, and representatives of the media and NGOs working in human rights and democracy. Keynote speakers included *Muna Reshmawi*, International Criminal Court in Geneva; *Nafe' Hasan*, Faculty of Law, Al Quds University; *Amin Maki Madani*, Country Representative, UN Human Rights Office in Palestine; and *Mousa Al Dweik*, Director, Law Studies Institute. Among the participants were *Hanan Ashrawi*, *Haidar Abdel Shafi* and *Faisal Al Hussein*.

**Objectives** To provide an overview of the recently adopted Rome Statue on the International Criminal Court. To discuss the implication of the new court on the state of human and citizen rights in Palestine. To outline the mechanisms necessary to facilitate the participation of the PNA in following up membership and participation in this new international legal order.

ATF published a special report on the event, including proceedings and attendants' recommendations. One of the recommendations called for the establishment of a national committee to follow this development, as it represented a unique opportunity. ATF was selected to chair a delegation composed of civil society representatives to meet with the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation to discuss the formation of a national committee. ATF initiated contact with said minister to that effect.

### **Workshop: Higher Education in Palestine**

The workshop on the future of higher education in Palestine was held in Ramallah on October 21<sup>st</sup>. Representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, Palestinian universities, student councils, staff unions, senior public figures, some PLC members, and NGOs, attended the meeting. The meeting commenced with a keynote presentation by *Munther Salah*, Minister of Higher Education.

**Objectives** To outline the current state of higher education in Palestine, future plans of the Ministry of Higher Education and interventions needed from various stakeholders to strengthen and promote this vital sector.

The Workshop recommendations called for a joint and long term participatory effort by all parties involved in higher education including the private sector, to identify priorities and needs. This would also include a carefully planned mobilization of scarce resources to deal with those needs and priorities.

With an aim to foster cooperation and coordination between civil society institutions and PNA Ministries, ATF approached the Minister of Higher Education (*Hanan*

*Ashrawi* at the time) to receive feedback on the activity's proposal. Her response was very encouraging and passed the proposal to her successor Dr. *Salah* who actively cooperated with ATF.

### **Public Debate: Public Boards of Inquiry**

The debate was held in Ramallah on November 11<sup>th</sup> and attended by 37 persons (7 females and 30 males). Representatives of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities, law centers and lawyer unions, political parties, civil society organizations and the media, attended the meeting.

Keynote speakers included Dr. *Adnan Amro*, Faculty of Law, Al Quds University and Dr. *Azmi Al Shu'aiby*, Chair of the PLC Budget Committee.

**Objectives** To provide an overview of the concept, mechanisms, types and outcome of public boards of inquiry. It also discussed means of assuring wider participation by Palestinian civil society institutions in the efficient functioning of such democratic tools.

The debate recommendations called on the Executive Authority and the PLC to suggest ways through which civil society may be involved in the works of such boards. Attendants concluded that there existed a need to recommend a legislation to govern the creation, responsibilities and outcomes of public boards of inquiry.

The proceedings and recommendations of the debate were published.

### **Public Debate: Palestinian Refugees Camps, Between National Prospects and the Status Quo**

The debate was held in Ramallah on December 12<sup>th</sup> and attended by 61 persons (6 females and 55 males). Representatives of the executive and legislative authorities, UNRWA, civil society organizations, PLO Refugees Committee, camps' citizens and the media, attended the meeting.

Keynote speakers included *As'ad Abdel Rahman*, member of the Executive Committee of the PLO in charge of Refugees Affairs, *Jamal Al Shati*, Chair, PLC Refugees Committee and *Abdallah Hourany*, Chair, Palestinian National Council Refugees Committee.

**Objectives** To raise the awareness and involvement of bodies dealing with refugee issues on the political, economic and social levels.

The debate recommendations called on the Executive Authority and the PLC to discuss ways through which the PNA, UNRWA, civil society organizations and governments of host Arab countries could improve their collaborative efforts to solve the daily life problems of the Palestinian refugees. This must not however, undermine the need for a permanent solution that should guarantee their inalienable rights to return to Palestine and/or to be compensated, as supported by the international community.

The proceedings and recommendation of the debate will be published in the upcoming issue of ATF' Quarterly Journal.

### **Workshop: The Role and Needs of Labor Unions in Palestine**

A workshop on the role and needs of Labor Unions in Palestine was held in Ramallah on February 22<sup>nd</sup> and attended by 67 participants (8 females and 59 males). Representatives of the Ministry of Labor, Palestinian Labor Union, local labor unions, private sector, senior public figures, some PLC members, and NGOs, attended the meeting. The activity commenced with a keynote presentation by *Rafiq Al Natsheh*, Minister of Labor.

**Objectives** To discuss and analyze the present conditions of Palestinian labor unions in the civil, legal and political spheres. It sought to identify the needs of this vital sector and to advise possible interventions to increase its involvement in the democratic process. Additionally, the workshop discussed the implications of the Labor Law on the development of this sector, and means through which the ministry, labor unions and the private sector could cooperate to present a modern legislation to the PLC.

The Workshop recommendations called on a joint and long term participatory effort by all parties involved in the labor sector, including the private sector, to identify priorities and needs. This would also include carefully prepared legislation on labor. Recommendations also emphasized the need to introduce a new, more gender sensitive legislation draft.

The recommendations were widely circulated to participants, the PLC's Legal and Social Affairs Committees and grassroots labor unions.

## **Political Party Meetings on Role of the Opposition:**

This approach is based on a realistic understanding of the important role played by the opposition in any political system. It is also based on the belief that political leadership may function more effectively and with greater transparency and credibility if an effective and responsible opposition existed. Such opposition can share in the responsibilities of control, guidance, constructive criticism and positive contribution to the development of the country.

Nine meetings between high level representatives of all main political opposition parties have taken place.

These meetings focused on creating opportunities for different representatives to meet and discuss the role of their respective parties in the capacity of political opposition. Also discussed were issues related to reaching a unified political program, the role of the opposition at the current stage, and coordination between the opposition parties as well as with the PNA.

Since May 1996, ATF has conducted 10 meetings under this theme with the participation of all major political parties, represented by high-ranking leaders<sup>7</sup>.

### **Meeting with Hamas Movement**

Following extensive efforts, a meeting was held with the Hamas movement in Gaza on September 19, 1998. The meeting included two sessions. In the first, ATF delegates met with three members of the Hamas political bureau, including *Ismael Abu Shanab*, *Ismael Haneyyeh* and *Mahmoud Al Zahhar*. The second session included a meeting with Hamas Leader Sheikh *Ahmad Yasin*.

The meeting served as a forum for exchanging views on recent developments in the democratization process in Palestine. It was conducted in a professional manner.

The Hamas leadership has shown a pragmatic position regarding relations with the PNA and its involvement in Palestinian internal life. Hamas will not challenge the base of legitimacy of the PNA. Furthermore, it doesn't have an interest in taking control of the PNA, as it rejects the Oslo Accords in principle. Hamas is willing however, and has even demonstrated this willingness, to participate in Palestinian democratic life. Respect for the rule of law, adoption of democratic and peaceful means, respect of political and ideological pluralism and full involvement of Hamas in the nation building process at the grassroots and mid-level political structures will govern this participation. This will not however undermine the movement's position regarding the struggle against Israeli occupation. Most important, Hamas will not be drawn into any armed confrontation with the PNA. A civil war constitutes a red line that will not be crossed.

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<sup>7</sup> For more details see a brief on each meeting including names of participants at [www.multaqa.org](http://www.multaqa.org). Information on previous meetings is available on the same site.

Hamas highlighted its commitment to a concrete and meaningful national dialogue with the participation of all political forces in Palestine. The work of ATF in that regard has received full appreciation.

The proceedings of the meeting were published in the autumn issue of ATF's quarterly journal, *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*.

### **Meeting with the Democratic Coalition in the PLC**

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was held with members of the Democratic Coalition in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Present were PLC members *Rawya Al Shawa, Hasan Khreishah and Mu'aweya Al Masry*.

Issues highlighted in the meeting include the democratization process in Palestine, role of parliamentary opposition and an evaluation of the coalition's experience in the PLC. The proceedings will be published in the upcoming issue of ATF's quarterly journal.

### **Meeting with Independent Islamic PLC members**

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was held with independent Islamic members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Present were PLC members *Fuad Eid, Karam Zarandah and Wajh Yaghy*.

The meeting discussed, among other issues, the democratization process in Palestine, role of parliamentary opposition and an evaluation of the members' experience in the PLC. The proceedings will be circulated to concerned bodies and published in the upcoming issue of *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*.

Throughout the reporting period, ATF maintained its efforts to expand the involvement of the widest possible range of the political spectrum in a concrete dialogue on the role of opposition. Contacts are underway to arrange meetings with prominent leaders of civil society organizations and with the Fatah movement block in the PLC, respectively.

## **Al Multaqa International Conference**

In preparation for this important activity, ATF's Executive Committee appointed a secretariat to oversee conference planning. Members include ATF President, two members of the Executive Committee, two members of the Board of Trustees and the Program Manager, who will serve as the rapporteur for the committee.

The conference "*Palestine at the Crossroads: Perspectives of Citizenship and Prospects of Identity*" will be held June 21-23, 1999 at Birzeit University. The conference aims to provide an in-depth evaluation of the performance of Palestinian society since the Oslo Accords. More than 40 local, Arab and international figures will present their views. If the conference is viewed as a worthwhile contribution, efforts will be made to continue this annually.

The conference will be held with the support of United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).



## **Town Hall Meetings**<sup>8</sup>

The Palestinian Legislative Council is considered one of the most important elements in the process of achieving an independent Palestinian State. It is also an essential factor in the establishment of a sound democratic system.

Despite the difficult and unstable circumstances surrounding the Council's performance and affecting its intended role, the Council continues its attempts to play a central political role by influencing political decisions and carrying out tasks of oversight and supervision of the government.

In order to enhance the Council's sphere of influence and develop the relationship between its members and the electorate, ATF initiated meetings in all West Bank and Gaza Strip districts. The purpose of these meetings is to identify and discuss issues of urgency and importance to the citizens of each district.

The meetings follow an agenda set by the electorate in each district and thereby serve as forums for the public to exercise its democratic rights. In addition to the general public, invitations are usually made to grassroots organizations, charitable societies, women committees and local NGOs. ATF aspires, through such meetings, to endorse the principle of "constituency policy," a process whereby elected representatives offer feedback to their constituents and, in return receive feedback from them.

Twenty-one town hall meetings were organized during the reporting period, thirteen in the West Bank and eight in Gaza. Due to their special nature, meetings held during the Democracy Day Campaign will be discussed separately.

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<sup>8</sup> For details of previous town hall meetings, please see ATF's website: [www.multaqa.org](http://www.multaqa.org)

## **Nablus 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Hall Meeting, April 18, 1998**

Following the first town hall meeting held in Nablus in December 1997, ATF received many requests to convene a second one in the district. Balata Camp was chosen as a suitable venue. The meeting was attended by an audience of 108 persons (all males.) with the participation of PLC members *Dalal Salameh*, *Mua'awiah Al Masry*, *Husam Kader* and *Kamel Al Afghani*. The constituents raised several issues. Of importance were the following:

1. High cost of utilities provided to the camp residents by Nablus municipality.
2. Applicability of the PNA's taxes system to the refugee camps and measures taken by the PLC to guarantee the implementation of an equitable tax system.
3. Lack of accountable and transparent regulations to govern abroad health services provision to acute cases.
4. Difficulties in obtaining residency permits for the families of returnees.
5. Means of improving the relationship between PLC members and their constituents.
6. Role of the PLC in preserving national unity and in avoiding internal conflicts.
7. Continued violations of the Israeli Government of the peace agreements.

## **Jerusalem Town Hall Meeting, May 19, 1998**

173 persons (27 females and 146 males) attended the meeting including three of the seven PLC members. They included *Hanan Ashrawi*, *Zeyad Abu Zeyad* and *Ahmad Al Zughayyer*. Other members apologized for not being able to attend due to urgent engagements. In particular, the absence of the PLC Speaker Abu Alaa' was disappointing, since all previous arrangements for the meeting were conducted in close contact with him personally, in addition to the symbolic implications of his absence, as this was the first town hall to be held in Jerusalem. The following were some of the important issues raised by the constituents:

1. Lack of PNA's support to infrastructure projects in Palestinian communities in the vicinity of Jerusalem that lie in area B according to the interim agreements.
2. Future PNA plans regarding improved functioning and services provision of the Jerusalem Electricity Company.
3. Academic and financial crises faced by Al Quds University and future plans to improve the sector of higher education in Palestine.
4. The works, priorities and functioning of the PLC committee on Jerusalem.
5. The political, social and economic situation in Jerusalem.

As a follow-up on some of the major issues raised in this meeting, ATF conducted two activities: a brainstorming session on the future of higher education in Palestine and a workshop on the socioeconomic needs and priorities of local communities in the vicinity of Jerusalem. See the section on conferences and symposia for further details.

### **Toubas Town Hall Meeting, September 26, 1998**

An audience of 235 persons (226 males and 9 females) attended the meeting with the participation of PLC member *Hashim Al Salih*, Governor of Jenin, *Zuheir Al Mnasrah*, and the Mayor of Toubas, all heads of local councils and representatives of all line Ministries and PNA institutions in the district. The constituents raised several issues. Of importance were the following:

1. Means of improving the relationship between PLC member and his constituents.
2. Many attendants harshly criticized their PLC representative for lack of willingness on his part to meet with his constituency and deal with their concerns.
3. Lack of infrastructure projects in the Toubas area.
4. Land confiscation and closures by Israeli occupation authorities.
5. Lack of public services in the Toubas area.
6. Means to improve PNA's delivery of services to the area.

The meeting came following a year of extensive work to convince Toubas's PLC member of the profound need to meet with his constituents. The participation of Jenin's Governor has been detrimental in inducing Mr. Al Salih to publicly face the people for the first time since his election. In fact, the Governor of Jenin has shown remarkable interest and logistical support to make the meeting a success.

### **Gaza City Town Hall Meeting, November 7, 1998**

An audience of 53 persons (5 females and 48 males) attended the meeting with the participation of PLC members *Wajih Yaghy* and *Nahid Al Rayyes*. The constituents raised several issues. Of importance were the following:

1. Means of improving the relationship between PLC members and their constituents. Many attendants harshly criticized the absence of other PLC members and lack of proper communication with their representatives.
2. The rising atmosphere of frustration and despair among Palestinian citizens due to the general political conditions and the deteriorating state of affairs between the PLC and the executive authority.
3. The implications of the "Wye River Agreement" on the peace process.
4. The recent measures taken by the PNA in terms of arresting opposition activists and imposing a house arrest on Hamas leader *Sheik Ahmad Yasin*.

Ex PLC member Dr. *Haidar Abdel Shafi* attended the meeting, and stated his reasons for resigning from the PLC. However, he called on citizens to support the democratic experience as represented in the PLC.

### **Bethlehem 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Hall Meeting, November 14, 1998**

An audience of 57 persons (2 females and 55 males) participated in the meeting, which was held in Dheisheh Camp. Present were PLC members *Daoud Al Zir*, *Mitry Abu Eitah*, *Besharah Daoud* and *Salah Al Ta'mary*. The panel included two UNRWA

senior officials *Mahmoud Abdel Hadi*, Chief Relief and Social Services Officer, West Bank and *Husein Shahin*, Camp Services Officer.

Constituents raised several concerns. Of importance were the following:

1. Recent cuts made by UNRWA in basic relief, social and medical services to Camp residents.
2. Land confiscation from the Camp's area by surrounding municipalities. The issue became of an urgent nature due to the acute population density in the Camp.
3. The role of PLC members in presenting and defending issues raised by Camp residents to the PNA.
4. Means to improve the process of democratic feedback between Camp residents and PLC members.

By bringing together camp representatives, PLC members and UNRWA senior officers, this meeting helped to consolidate an open and direct handling of issues bearing important implications on the daily life of Dheisheh Camp citizens.

#### **Gaza City 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Hall Meeting, November 14, 1998**

An audience of 42 persons (4 females and 38 males) participated in the meeting, which was held in Al Shati' Camp. Present were PLC members *Ziad Abu Amro*, *Yousif Al Shanti*, *Fakhry Shakkourah* and *Nahid Al Rayyes* who had also participated in the first Gaza District Meeting.

Constituents raised many issues. Of importance were the following:

1. Many participants pointed to the fact that despite wide publicity, few people showed up for the meeting in a camp with more than 60,000 inhabitants. While many participants were grassroots leaders and senior representatives, ordinary citizens showed little interest. This demonstrated the present gap between PLC members and their constituents.
2. The rising feelings of frustration amongst people because of the prevailing political conditions.
3. The right of taxpayers to observe and monitor how the PNA budget is being spent.
4. The fear of the rising number of monopolies, specifically in the electricity, communications and fuel sectors and measures taken by the PLC to protect consumers rights.
5. Actions taken by the PNA to face the unemployment problem in Gaza.
6. The haphazard exploitation of the Gaza sea shore.

#### **Deir Al Balah Town Hall Meeting, December 17, 1998**

An audience of 41 persons (2 females and 39 males) participated in the meeting, which was held in Al Nusairat Camp. Present were PLC members *Jamilleh Saydam*, Minister of Industry *Sa'dy Krunz*, *Jalal Al Musaddar* and *Ibrahim Al Habbash*.

Constituents raise several issues, including:

1. Once more, the issue of poor attendance by ordinary citizens was raised. Many participants attributed this continuing phenomenon to the lack of trust and interest on the part of constituents who lost faith in the ability of the PLC to have a greater impact on the economic and political conditions in Palestine.
2. The unemployment problem.

### **Gaza North Town Hall Meeting, February 20, 1999**

An audience of 81 persons (9 females and 72 males) attended the meeting with the participation of PLC members *Kamal Al Sharafi*, *Jamal Eid* and *Marwan Kanafani*. The constituents raised several issues. Of importance were the following:

1. Means of improving the relationship between PLC members and their constituents. Many attendants harshly criticized the absence of other PLC members and lack of proper communication with their representatives.
2. The rising atmosphere of frustration and despair amongst Palestinian citizens due to the general political conditions and the deteriorating state of affairs between the PLC and the Executive Authority.
3. Lack of essential health services such as a hospital and an ambulance vehicle in the district.
4. Lack of sufficient space in PNA and UNRWA schools, which has led to implementing a cumbersome three-shift school day.

The above meetings were closely coordinated with the PLC main office in Ramallah and PLC district offices in the West Bank and Gaza. The majority of attendants were representatives of grassroots organizations, NGOs, students, municipal and village councils and senior PNA officials.

Generally speaking, the meetings succeeded in achieving most of the anticipated results. The lively discussions that took place, the wide media coverage and the feedback received from both attendants and PLC member indicated the importance of organizing similar meetings in the future. It was obvious however, that Gaza citizens showed less enthusiasm than did those in the West Bank to attend meetings for PLC members.

In an effort to systematically receive PLC members' feedback, ATF prepared and distributed a special questionnaire to all PLC members (around thirty) who participated in ATF district meetings during the first year of the Program cycle. Unfortunately, only eight PLC members, about 26%, actually filled and returned the questionnaires, in spite of several verbal and written reminders. While the eight questionnaires reported extremely encouraging feedback, ATF has been unsatisfied with the number of returned questionnaires and will follow up the matter in future.

## **Town Hall Meetings- Democracy Day Campaign, March 8-16, 1999**

In February, the Palestinian Legislative Council took a decision to initiate the Democracy Day Campaign on March 7, 1999. A major aim of the campaign was to start an annual national practice of commemorating the 7<sup>th</sup> of March as the Democracy Day. This date coincides with March 7, 1996, on which the PLC was inaugurated. The rationale was that constituents and citizens at large have the right to learn about the PLC in terms of its duties, functions and works. Here, the rule of PLC as an institution working in legislation, oversight and monitoring, and in enhancing the development of a healthy civil society in an environment governed by the rule of law and safeguarding democratic freedoms, would be pointed out. The major theme of the Democracy Day Campaign was to raise awareness among Palestinian citizens of democratic principles and the importance of parliamentary democracy. A focal group was youth, as they represented the major players in the future of democratic formation.

In response, ATF took the initiative and participated in the campaign with two major activities: conducting Town Hall meetings in all Palestinian districts and publishing an information sheet on works of the PLC. ATF perceived the campaign as a means to encourage citizens to directly interact with their representatives in an in depth reflection on the positive and negative aspects of the past three years. It also provided a platform for promotion of democratic principles and democratic institutions. The meetings proved to be a valuable platform to encourage citizens to evaluate in a transparent and participatory manner the PLC's three-year experience at all levels.

On deciding to participate, ATF was guided by the following conditions:

1. To conduct activities that are of a similar nature to those included in the cooperative agreement and to avoid duplicating the work of others.
2. To conduct activities which do not promote individuals, but promote ideas and concepts of essence to democratic formation and participation of civil society.
3. To facilitate rather than seize the capacity of the PLC's district offices, we opted to introduce a model on how to conduct activities in an well-organized manner with concrete results.
4. To have a clear definition of tasks between ATF and the district offices, an action plan was worked out to define roles. ATF was totally responsible to implement the activities, however PLC offices conducted certain tasks.

The following meetings were held:

<b>District</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>No. of Participating PLC Members</b>	<b>No. of Participating Citizens</b>
<b>Nablus</b>	<b>9/3/1999</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Salfit</b>	<b>9/3/1999</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Khan Younis</b>	<b>9/3/1999</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Hebron</b>	<b>10/3/1999</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Ramallah</b>	<b>11/3/1999</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>70</b>

<b>Gaza North</b>	<b>11/3/1999</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Jenin</b>	<b>13/3/1999</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Middle Gaza</b>	<b>13/3/1999</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>Tul Karem</b>	<b>14/3/1999</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Qalqilia</b>	<b>14/3/1999</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Gaza</b>	<b>14/3/1999</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Bethlehem</b>	<b>15/3/1999</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Jerusalem</b>	<b>16/3/1999</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>49</b>	<b>1550</b>

Meetings were not held in Rafah, Jericho and Toubas districts. In Rafah the meeting was cancelled at last minute due to incidents in the city. Dr. *Saeb Erekat* apologized for not being able to participate in the Jericho meeting because he was on an official mission outside the country. Mr. *Hashim Al Saleh* apologized for not being able to participate in the Toubas meeting. He gave no explanation however.

ATF compiled a final report on the proceedings of the meetings with emphasis on issues raised by constituents. The document will be shared with PLC members and civil society organizations. The value of the event proved to be in its simultaneous nature, as it offered an opportunity to have a sort of a “random sample” representing the Palestinian public opinion at a certain point of time. The following are some highlights on the main issues raised in the report.

### **1- PLC members participation**

Out of 80 PLC members representing the thirteen districts, 49 members (61.3%) participated in the meetings. Out of 23 PLC members who are serving in the PNA Cabinet, 7 members (30.4%) participated in the meetings.

### **2- Issues raised by constituents**

The constituents raised several issues. In general, three categories were identified:

#### **Political issues**

- Reasons for extending the mandate of the PLC without conducting national elections.
- Prospects for declaring an independent state on May 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Participation of the PLC speaker in the Wye River negotiations.
- Reasons for not endorsing the Basic Law by the Executive Authority.
- Continuation of settlement activities by Israel in the occupied areas.
- Poor outcome of the work of the Palestinian negotiating team.
- Marginalization of the PLC’s role in legislation and oversight.
- Negligence of the Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

#### **General issues**

- An increasing frustration from the low level of functioning of the PNA

- An obvious lack of interest on the part of constituents to attend meetings with PLC members. On the other hand few PLC members are taking concrete efforts to strengthen relations with their electorates
- An existing weak and ignored Judicial Authority with duplicate and contradicting legal terms of reference
- Widespread mishandling of appointments in the civil service
- An appalling unemployment crises
- An unexplained delay in endorsing crucial legislation by the Executive Authority
- Negligence of providing handicapped with adequate services
- Need to address teachers' basic needs
- Circumstances surrounding implementing capital punishment
- Continuation of defying the decisions of the Palestinian Supreme Court
- Fate of NGO legislation following the decision of the Cabinet to return it to the PLC for a third reading
- Criticizing political detentions
- Absence of guarantees to protect freedom of thought and free expression
- Functioning of monopolies supported and protected by government in certain crucial sectors

### **Local issues**

- Need to support Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem (Jerusalem)
- Need to protect services rights of Jerusalem Electricity Company (Jerusalem)
- Lack of sufficient educational classes in PNA and UNRWA schools (Gaza)
- North and Gaza City)
- Practices of security force in Al Najah University (Nablus)
- Lack of basic infrastructures (Khan Younis)
- Housing problems (Gaza and Gaza North)
- Lack of vehicles licensing offices (Bethlehem and Jenin)
- Decline in educational attainment (Tul Karem)
- Disruptions in electricity provision (Gaza)
- High costs of telecommunication services (Gaza and Nablus)
- Sanitary problems and lack of a hospital (Gaza North and Middle Gaza)
- Negligence of refugees daily problems (Tul Karem and Middle Gaza)
- Reservations on Monetary Authority regulations governing currency exchange establishments (Ramallah)

### **3- General observations**



1. ATF, in cooperation with the PLC district offices, took tremendous efforts to inform the public in advance about the meetings, whether through personal and public invitations, public announcements or newspaper ads. Nevertheless and with few exceptions, citizens turnout was relatively low with an average of 119 participants per meeting. The highest number of participants was in Gaza Middle with 362 participants and the least was in Qalqilya with 27 participants.
2. The low percentages of participating PLC members who serve in the Cabinet.
3. Good cooperation on the part of PLC's executive staff and district offices.
4. While it is difficult to draw general concrete conclusions on the state of the democratization and reconstruction processes in Palestine, these meeting, which represented the opinions of a relatively random sample, point to the following trends:
  - There exists a state of deep frustration and despair among citizens stemming from the current state of affairs in relations between the Legislative and Executive Authorities and the weakening of the Judicial Authority; the stalemate in the peace process and the deepening economic crises.
    - There exist indications pointing to a state of mistrust between citizens and the PNA's judicial, legislative and executive institutions. This state is rooted in the feeling that the building process of a true democratic society is not receiving due attention. The danger here is the creation of an attitude of indifference among citizens and consequently average citizens would opt to avoid participation in a process that is not fulfilling their aspirations and needs.
    - It was obvious that the political and general issues received wider attention among citizens than local issues which may support the above mentioned observations.

## Research

The Arab Thought Forum adopted various research methodologies depending on the type and goals of conducted research, including *Field Research*, *Theoretical and analytical research*, *Focus Group Methodology* and *Bibliography*.

By using different research methodologies, ATF has the basic requirements to deal with various sorts of data in terms of data collection tools, data classification and analysis according the needs of each study.

ATF has sufficient expertise in using various types of computer software to deal with data and is able to pool the efforts of capable consultants to carry out various research activities. In addition, ATF's staff and equipment are of high qualifications to handle all research requirements.

Thus far, ATF has conducted an extensive field survey in the Jordan Valley. Additionally, ATF conducted a five-year survey of field data under the "*Agriculture Data Base Project*" (1991-1995), providing baseline statistical data on agriculture and related fields. During the project period, 21 statistical reports were published. ATF has also participated in various field surveys in Jerusalem, particularly in the old city and has provided extensive support to the general census carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics in Jerusalem last year. It also provided technical support to PNGO network in the initial phases of its survey on Palestinian NGOs in Jerusalem. Similar research was also conducted by ATF on a consultancy basis for other partners including the Austro-Arab Society (SAAR) and the Fredrich Ebert Foundation.

Additionally, a group of prominent political and academic figures were approached to participate in the works of a focus group to prepare for the strategic research on the "Future Political System in Palestine." The group, which included *Ziad Abu Amro*, *Ahmad Al Khaldi*, *Sakher Habash*, *Jamil Hilal*, *Abdel Rahim Mallouh* and *Qais Abdel Kareim*, has completed the preparation of a draft outline for the research. The second phase will concentrate on finalizing the research outline, establishing methodological guidelines and identifying researchers.

Another major intervention for ATF in this regard was the research and analysis of public opinion trends based on polls conducted between 1994 and 1999 by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC).

**"Democratic Formation Reports"** are the major qualitative research published by ATF during the last two years. In addition to one annual report, four quarterly reports have been issued. The reports comprehensively analyze and monitor the democratic process in Palestine with an emphasis on researching the performance of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities and civil society institutions.

Another important area of research is related to the legal and legislative components of the democracy program. By establishing the **Citizen Rights Center** in 1997, ATF started to research the performance of Palestinian National Authority institutions in two main venues:

- A) Claims submitted to the Center by citizens.

B) Analyzing legislation issued by the Palestinian Legislative Council.

In both venues, databases were created to track developments and to monitor results.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the research carried out by ATF had a high impact on Palestinian development. National strategies and policies have been developed based on ATF research. Councils have been formed due to ATF initiatives and motivation. Finally, ATF's research has been widely cited by academics and researchers alike.

## Publications

Since its establishment in 1977, the Arab Thought Forum issued more than 140 publications covering a wide variety of subjects. **ATF's publications list** includes books, reports and research papers.<sup>9</sup> During the reporting period, several different publications have been issued, with a total circulation volume of over 35,000 copies.

### *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*<sup>10</sup>

The Arab Thought Forum's journal *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh* has been a major tool of encouraging and implementing specialized research. During the last 10 years, 19 volumes have been issued containing more than 150 research papers in various areas including: industry, agriculture, housing, tourism, infrastructure, Jerusalem and democracy.

*Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh* welcomes papers in the following topics:

- The peace process, including the final status issues of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and final borders
- Democratic and legal issues including human and citizens' rights, international laws etc.
- Development issues
- State building and reform of public institutions

The Summer and Autumn issues of *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*, the quarterly Journal of ATF, were issued. The *Second, Third and Forth Quarterly Reports on the Democratization Process in Palestine* was one of the major contents.

Efforts are underway to prepare for publishing the Winter/Spring 1999 issue during the coming quarter. The *Fifth Quarterly Report on the Democratization Process in Palestine* will be one of the major contents.

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<sup>9</sup> ATF's publications list can be found at [www.multaqa.org](http://www.multaqa.org)

<sup>10</sup> For a content list of previous issues, see our Website.

## **ATF's Newsletter (*Al Multaqa*)**

During the past year, two issues of ATF's Newsletter *Al-Multaqa* were published. The publication intended to serve as a news supplement to *Shu'un Tanmawiyeh*, covered ATF activities of the previous six months. The publication is widely circulated both locally and internationally.

## **General Report on Democratic Formation**

Both the Arabic and English versions of the *General Report on the Democratic Formation in Palestine* were published in March 1999. The report covered the period from April 1997 to October 1998, thus including four Quarterly Reports on the Democratization Process in Palestine. It includes an in depth description and analysis of factors underlining the participation of civil society in the decision making process; and an analysis of the works of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities throughout the eighteen-month period.

A special meeting was conducted in April to discuss the outcome of the report with senior officials, members of the opposition and public figures, who received the report in advance. A second meeting was conducted with the general public. The same approach was adopted in a third meeting, with international organizations and officials working in Palestine. Thus far, feedback indicates a deep appreciation of the efforts and quality of the report.

## **Reports and Proceedings**

ATF regularly releases reports and proceedings of ATF events to various institutions, governmental and non-governmental. The reports are also available to the public. Reports issued in the last year include:

### **Palestinian Public Opinion since the Peace Process      August 1998**

Published jointly with the Jerusalem Media and Communications center (JMCC).

### **National Coding System      April 1998**

This special report on the proceedings of a public debate held in September 1997.

### **Palestinian Development Plan      June 1998**

The special report on the proceedings of a public debate held in February 1998.

### **The International Criminal Court      January 1999**

The special report on the proceedings of the special study session.

### **Public Boards of Inquiry      February 1999**

The special report on the proceedings of a public debate.

### **Information Sheets and Monthly Reports**

- A simple information sheet was prepared for town hall meetings. The sheets included summarized biographic data on each representative, contact addresses and roles played by the representative in the PLC and/or the PNA.
- An information sheet on the Citizen Rights Center was distributed to participants in all of the public activities.
- Twelve monthly information sheets on democratic formation in Palestine were distributed during the reporting period. The sheets are designed to provide the reader with information on the works of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the PNA that were of relevance to the democratization process. Additionally, the sheets have formed a baseline data for future quarterly reports on democratic formation in Palestine.
- In coordination with the PLC and as part of its involvement in the Democracy Day Campaign, ATF produced a special information sheet on the PLC. The purpose of the information sheet is to raise citizens' awareness of the PLC's mandate, structure, functions, duties and to provide some statistical data on its works during the past three years. From a programmatic point of view it falls under the objective of introducing information sheets describing the functions of the PLC for Palestinian citizens.

About 20,000 copies of the sheet were widely distributed in the West Bank and Gaza. The sheet received very positive reaction.

## **Citizen Rights Center**

### *The Arab Thought Forum's link between the Citizen and the Authority*

The Citizen Rights Center (CRC) was founded in 1997 by the Arab Thought Forum to assist individual citizens, monitor, and provide feedback on public performance. The idea behind founding this center is based on the principle of facilitating direct contact between citizens and the Authority, and helping the citizen to present his/her claims without a feeling of inferiority before government officials. In other words, it aims to consolidate civil society, taking in to consideration that individuals are the basic components of the society. Citizen's who are afraid of defending their rights and willing to accept injustice, will in turn engender a vulnerable society.

In addition to directly helping solve individual issues, one important and comprehensive goal was to create an impression with both the citizen and Authority that individual rights must be respected and protected. Furthermore, if a violation of rights occurs, there will indeed be a possibility for follow-up and rehabilitation through democratic means.

In a very short period, the Center has managed to face the basic challenge of gaining recognition and respect from citizens who came to realize and appreciate the importance of the service it provides. This was reflected in the analysis of numbers and nature of cases the Center has received and the number of citizens approaching the Center for advice.

The Center also proved its ability to receive the attention and recognition of local and national government institutions. This could be easily noticed from the responses received from these authorities, which to a large extent had maintained a very cautious approach towards similar interventions in the past.

In sum, the past period witnessed a laying of stable foundations for a promising future for the Center in terms of fulfilling its mandate. The current state of affairs in the field of citizens' rights in Palestine warrants a full-fledged citizen center.

## **Objectives**

1. To offer legal assistance to citizens in the areas of the legal process, legislation process, civic and political rights and allegations of the abuse or denial of those rights.
2. To support citizens in pursuing their rights within the democratic process i.e. in matters of conflict between the citizen and local or national government.
3. To offer a direct service to the public to test the flexibility of the democratic process and its reaction to criticism and complaint.

4. To establish working links with local and national representatives and to offer the CRC as a venue for public/representative meetings.
5. To promote and nurture the idea of “surgeries” based on the model of professional and confidential exchange between citizens and their representatives.
6. To provide a simple language summary and analysis of the draft legislation that average citizens and civil society organizations understand, so that people have a clear idea about legislation and what it means to them.

## **Analysis**

The aim of the Center is to determine and examine cases that reflect a major trend and thus should be dealt with in a comprehensive approach.

Through analyzing the cases received so far, various general trends were noted:

- **Prisoners’ Cases** which relates to the denial or abuse of civic rights and undue legal process. For example, torture, detention for unlimited periods without due legal process, illegal arrests, banning lawyers from visiting prisoners, failing to notify relatives on detention and detention in remote areas.
- **Residency Cases** related to the inability of an individual to obtain a residency permit, unresolved family reunion cases pertaining to returnees, and the improper handling of residency documents.
- **Civil Service Cases** related to the improper handling of civil service regulations or denial of employment rights.

It is necessary to point out that the Center does not intend to follow-up the legal cases at courts, because this will be the responsibility of the citizens and their lawyers. The role of the center is to provide information, advice and guidance.

## **Summary of Activities**

The Center received and followed up 205 citizen rights cases during the reporting period bringing the total number of cases handled since its establishment to 334 cases. The noted rise in the number of cases is attributed to the hiring of two field workers who began in mid-September to implement a plan to expand the geographic coverage of the Center.

The Center joined the Council for Palestinian Human Rights Organizations in publishing several public statements on various citizen rights issues. One statement called on the executive branch of the PNA to take immediate measures to ensure its commitment to democratic principles, rule of law and respect the separation of powers. In particular, the statement asked for the security apparatuses to respect citizens rights in due legal process. Another condemned the attack on PLC members



by security personnel in front of the Awadallah house in Al Bireh. The statement called the executive branch of the PNA to take immediate measures to bring those responsible for the attack to trial and to again ensure its commitment to democratic principles, rule of law and respect for the separation of power. Other statements were issued on the detention of opposition activists, as well as an appeal to halt the use of capital punishment. This was done pending a careful evaluation and assessment of the past experience, which showed that public reaction rather than due legal action directed the decision to implement or halt the use of this punishment.

An article prepared by both the CRC legal and citizen rights officers on the role of the PLC in safeguarding social justice was published in the Palestinian daily Al Quds in May 1998.

CRC actively participated in organizing a march for civil society democracy and human rights organizations to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights. The march was held in Ramallah, in December 1998, and joined by some PLC members and political leaders. The Center joined the Council for Palestinian Human Rights Organizations in publishing a special poster on the occasion.

A notable rise in cases related to the arrests of opposition political activists has been noted following the signing of the Wye River Agreement. As in similar past cases, most of the arrests were made without due legal process.

During the same period, several cases of misuse of force by security personnel have been filed. A painful example was the killing of youth *Wasim Al Tarif* in Ramallah by members of the Military Intelligence Services during a peaceful demonstration to protest the force entry into Fatah office in Ramallah by the same security apparatus. Four deaths were reported during the month of March 1999 in the Ramallah area alone.

## **Legislation Unit**

This Unit is a new addition to CRC. It was established to provide simple narratives of the main points cited in approved laws and regulations. These narratives are often reproduced and distributed in the form of booklets or pamphlets. Thus far, three pamphlets have been issued.

The Legislation Officer assumed her duties on September 1<sup>st</sup>. She started by establishing professional contacts and relations with various entities working in the field of legislation. Meetings were held with: the Director of Deiwani Al Fatwa at the Ministry of Justice, Chairperson of the PLC legal Committee, public relations staff at PLC's main office in Ramallah, ARD staff, Legislative Coordinator of the PNGO network, staff at the BZU Institute of Law, staff of the Legislative Research Unit at the PLC and others.

The Legislation Officer has also compiled data on the status of Palestinian legislation. The data is electronically stored and updated on a regular basis. It was made available to the public.

A detailed action plan for the unit has been produced. The plan identified several articles of legislation to be presented to citizens in a simplified manner during the coming period. Two publications were issued during the reporting period, the first on the Civil Service Law and the second on Firearms and Ammunition Law. A third publication on Local Government Councils and Local Elections Laws was published in April 1999.

The Legislation Officer actively participated in researching and drafting of a position paper on the Civil Status Legislation. The Palestinian NGO Network and several women's organizations have circulated the paper to PLC members during the discussions on the draft legislation. Most of the issues raised in the paper were adopted by the PLC. This represented yet another example of how united lobbying efforts by civil society organizations will have a tangible impact on the decision making process.

## **Resource Center**

ATF runs a well-known Resource Center, which includes about four thousand resource books, periodicals, documents and audiovisual resources. The resource center, which focuses on all issues of relevance to the Palestinian question, maintains linkages to international and local research bodies. A special section on issues related to civil society, democratic formation and citizens' rights have recently been added to it.

In a step to strengthen ATF's research capacity, hundreds of political and legislative resources, specialized books and periodicals, have been acquired and added to the resource center which includes over 3500 titles. Among the new resources was a collection of useful publications, which used to be part of IFIS library, and donated to ATF by USAID mission.

The process of classification has been successful due to the help of a professional librarian. Special computer software was installed to develop an electronic database for the resource center contents and to speed up the classification and retrieval processes. In total, over 1000 new publications have been classified and made available for users.

## **Networking and Professional Development**

Throughout the reporting period, various meetings and other activities were held with democracy and human rights organizations, PNA officials and NGOs with related projects to introduce the program, discuss and practice professional coordination, and to receive feedback. Additionally, a number of staff attended training courses, symposia and conferences outside the country.<sup>11</sup>

ATF continued to play an important role in the Palestinian NGO Network in terms of maintaining a high level of participation in most of its activities and through its membership in the editorial committee for PNGO's Arabic news supplement.

In an effort to disseminate information ATF completed a campaign to distribute more than 7500 copies of its publications since its establishment in 1977. Copies which included more than 50 titles were packaged in parcels and distributed locally, to schools and remote libraries through the Ministry of Culture, Agricultural Cooperatives Union, Agricultural Relief Committees, Union of Charitable Organizations and others.

The process of developing ATF's web site has continued throughout the reporting period. The site was announced on various search engines in spring 1999. Initial feedback has been encouraging. The site's address is [www.multaqa.org](http://www.multaqa.org). The second stage of upgrading the site will include extensive information on Palestine. This phase will be completed by April 2000.

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<sup>11</sup> More details are available in ATF's newsletter.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation factors have indicated more than satisfactory performance over the past year. Taking in to account the limited time frame of one year however, it was difficult to qualitatively assess the overall performance of the programs in terms of achieving the overall objective of providing citizens with the means and mechanisms to participate in the government decision making process.

It is indicative to point out however, that ATF has been successful in utilizing the various activities and interventions in a comprehensive manner that is furthering its involvement in creating a better environment to increase citizens' participation in the decision making process. The ability of ATF to select the most critical issues of concern to citizens and to introduce a democratic platform to deal with them is of the utmost importance. ATF is helping to set a practical example on how to handle citizens concerns through adopting participatory and democratic means.

## General Statistical Information

**April 1,1998 - March 31,1999**

**No. Of Beneficiaries / Type of Activity**

Activity	Date	No. of Participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Town Hall Meeting- Nablus (2)	18/4/1998	108	-	108
Town Hall Meeting- Jerusalem	19/5/1998	146	27	173
Conference- Palestinian Municipal Elections.... When?	30/5/1998	178	9	187
Public Debate- Role of the Attorney General in the Democratization Process	23/6/1998	36	10	46
Symposia- Bethlehem 2000 Project	12/8/1998	53	13	68
Public Debate- Women's Participation in the Political and Administrative Spheres in Palestine	13/8/1998	17	32	49
Parties Meeting- Hamas Movement	19/8/1998	7	-	7
Workshop: The Socioeconomic Needs and Priorities of Local Communities in the Vicinity of Jerusalem	5/9/1998	89	10	99
Town Hall Meeting- Toubas	26/9/1998	226	9	235
Symposia- International Criminal Court	28/9/1998	22	5	27
Workshop: The Future of Higher Education in Palestine	21/10/1998	31	6	37
Parties Meeting- Democratic Coalition in the PLC	26/10/1998	8	3	11
Town Hall Meeting- Gaza (1)	7/11/1998	48	5	53
Public Debate- Public Boards of Inquiry	11/11/1998	30	7	37
Town Hall Meeting- Bethlehem (2)	14/11/1998	55	2	57
Town Hall Meeting- Gaza (2)	14/11/1998	38	4	42
Public Debate- Palestinian Refugees Camps, Between the Status Quo and a National Settlement	12/12/1998	55	6	61

Town Hall Meeting- Deir Al-Balah	17/12/1998	39	2	41
Town Hall Meeting- Gaza North	20/2/1999	72	9	81
Workshop: The Role and Needs of Labor Unions in Palestine	22/2/1999	59	8	67
Town Hall Meetings- Democracy Day Campaign- Nablus, Salfit, Khan Younis, Hebron, Ramallah, Gaza North, Jenin, Deir Al Balah, Tul Karem, Qalqilia, Gaza City, Bethlehem and Jerusalem	8-16/3/1999	1409	141	1550
Parties Meetings- Independent Islamic PLC members	17/3/1999	5	-	5
Citizen Rights Center (No. of Cases Received and followed up)	1/4/1998 – 31/3/1999	-	-	355

- The total Number of cases received and followed by CRC doesn't include the number of citizens that approached the Center for legal advice, averaging 15 cases/month. This number is excluded from beneficiaries' total since a case may pertain to several individuals.