

The Year in Review

The Challenge

In few months of being independent, the twenty fifth anniversary of the Arab Thought Forum (AL Multaqa) will take place. Ever since its establishment, AL Multaqa has continuously implemented its programs and activities within a comprehensive geographical coverage and through vast work contacts and experiences.

If this is considered an achievement, it is then evaluated within the boundaries of its mandate and objectives, however the real challenge for the Arab Thought Forum is to in continuing and offering its services and at the same time maintain its independence by not affiliating itself to any political trend and continuing to develop its programs in accordance with its own agenda which is built on its thorough analysis of the current conditions and the determination of its level involvement in these conditions; surly it is a challenge for the Arab Thought Forum to brought pride on.

It may appear easy to say that, but in fact it is a tough challenge that requires great ability to prove a self worth and a strong identity in a medium of a strong competition for funds and resources which in many instances are connected with a specific and impregnable political agenda and connections .

The challenge lies in the ability of the institution to continue its task in providing services, implementing activities and developing programs without relying on any political or party contacts that make the issue of getting funds nonnegotiable. Al Multaqa is in fact dependent on persuading donors and sponsors of its managerial and technical capability in carrying out programs by drawing attention to its excellent record of achievements.

The Arab Thought Forum does not regard this mission as a challenge only, but also a necessity in order to preserve its creditably, to address Varsity topics and target various sectors and segments in the society without being subject to any influences or dictations.

The Political Environment

The dangerous setback in the Peace Process, which took place with the failure of the Camp David Summit on July 2000, together with the increasing frustration and economic hardship amongst the Palestinian population since the signing of the Oslo Accords has produced a major shift. The Palestinian who finally realized that Israel intends to retain its control over the Palestinian Territories by continuing a system of apartheid-like physical separation coupled with what seemed to be an unconditional support by the US administration to the Israeli side, Palestinians were actually losing both hope and faith on what originally has been marketed as a guaranteed track to fulfill their aspirations.

In this critical atmosphere came the ill-timed and provocative visit of Israeli right wing leader Ariel Sharon to Al Aqsa mosque on September 28, 2000 with the approval of Ehud Barak and the protection of over one thousand Israeli soldiers which ignited the flame of Al-Aqsa *Intifada*.

A further escalation in the situation encompassing all levels of daily life in Palestine has taken place. The Second Palestinian *Intifada* has once more drawn the attention of the world to the harsh realities of living under military occupation. Contrary to what has been described as the only viable road to peace, the Oslo track has proven that it has lost its credibility amongst Palestinians who lost hundreds of lives along with thousands of injured during the confrontations. In several recently issued and well documented reports by various parties such as Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and the United Nations Under Secretary for Human Rights on the present crisis, all condemned Israel for its illegal, excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against Palestinians inside and outside its Territories. Israel was also condemned for the use of mass punishment policy as embedded in the imposition of a state of complete siege on the Palestinian population which has led to great economic and human sufferings. Various interventions were carried to bring an end to the confrontations. It seemed however that this time there exists a profound need to handle the core rights of the Palestinian people as stipulated in Security Council's resolutions 242 and 338 and UN resolution 194 as the minimum possible to bring an end to the conflict.

During the intensive talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians in Taba over important subjects related to the Final Status issues, it became that the talks had been no more than election maneuvers without any positive results. The election of Sharon as the new Prime Minister on February 2001 brought with it the fears of escalation in the situation encompassing all level of daily life in Palestine. The economic hardship continued with the drastic increase of unemployment rate of over 40% and a total loss amounting at several billion of dollars. This is in addition to severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods as a result of the Israeli military and political measures taken to counteract the Intifada.

With the transfer of power in the Israeli Government in March 2001 and the emergence of the Sharon Government, there was a drastic escalation of events. The Sharon policy that aimed to end the Palestinian *Intifada* without any political change provided the basis for waves of bloody events in which many civilians were killed and injured. The escalation had a devastating impact on Palestinians, resulting in severe economic and social hardships. The extended closure practically paralyzed the normal daily life of Palestinians and divided the Palestinian Territories into more than 60 separate segments.

Sharon's non-acceptable conditions, together with the changes in the US Administration brought the political talks to complete freezing. The call for international protection for the Palestinians has been vetoed by the US at the Security Council leaving the Palestinians under the control of Israeli aggressive forces and measures. The Sharm El-Sheikh investigation committee spent several days in the area to study the situation. On the other hand, the Arab summit held in Amman failed to provide an answer for issues related to safety and economic conditions in the Palestinian Territories.

The Mitchell report provided an opening for a solution to the ongoing violence, especially with extensive international involvement, namely the US and the Europeans. Although the report emphasized the need to bridge the extensive gaps

between the parties and between the political realities, it failed to address the real issue behind the conflict, which is the occupation, therefore, reaching and maintaining a ceasefire would be difficult as a result of this unbalanced attitude of the international community.

It has been noted, however, that there has been a certain level of calming of violent activities. This level was not sufficient to provide the needed environment conducive to further talks, particularly in light of Sharon's extreme political views and the official Israeli policy of liquidation of Palestinian activists, in addition to the continued settler attacks against Palestinian civilians and villages.

The tragic terrorist acts witnessed in the United States on September 11, 2001, had been utilized by the Israeli government for its benefit with the insistence of the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on a complete ceasefire and utter silence that would express the Palestinian surrender without even a glimpse of political hope. The only message sent by "Sharon" was that the Palestinians had to be satisfied with what they had already got!

Within the process of exercising pressure, an unprecedented escalation had been used, which was manifested in two main practices: the first and most severe was the oppressive procedures against civilians through closures and isolation that led not only to the division of the Palestinian Territories into more than 60 isolated areas, but also to return the Palestinian way of life to pre-twentieth century and to inflict fatal casualties on hundreds of Palestinians. The second practice was the Israeli official policy of assassination, which resulted in tens of Palestinians losses, some of whom were senior political leaders.

The Palestinian people have shown a unique stand in facing the Israeli policy of aggression. It was natural that the immensity of the events and the increasing number of deaths along with the thousands of handicapped and injured among the Palestinians, as well as the material damages would affect the different aspects of life and change the national priorities. It is worthwhile to add that due to the Israeli measures a great deal of the requirements for national and institutional building has regressed while public infrastructure was destroyed or damaged, the economic situation of both the citizens and the country had deteriorated and the work in many areas has been directed to maintain emergent cases rather than ordinary life activities.

The first year of the twenty first century was particularly very difficult for the Palestinian people. Practically speaking, the region did not enter a new year of bloody struggle, but in fact it has started a new century of bloody struggle. This is considered a long period of time at all measures. The twentieth century had witnessed the outbreak and end of two world wars and the start and end of tens of regional battles and conflicts. It has also in general witnessed the termination of the colonization era where more than 150 states obtained their freedom and independence during the last 50 years of the past century. The only exception are the Palestinian people who are still surviving in their continuous agony and suffering under the yoke of occupation and foreign colonization for a period of four decades. Moreover, the Palestinian refugees' camps are suffering for more than six successive decades. The only hope that could ultimately pave the way for independence and the fulfillment of the

people's dream in having an independent and secure state was completely shattered by the huge Israeli arsenal with its gradual destruction power. It has started with rubber bullets, tear gas and live ammunition. Then it moved into an unprecedented stage of destruction, closure of roads, banning inhabitants from movement and turning hundreds of Palestinian cities and villages into isolated and remote areas that the only way to reach is on foot and under the barrage of live shooting of fire that might expose the life pedestrians to the risk of injury or death. They have reached to a stage and in which air to land, sea to land, and to land missiles and hundreds of highly equipped and fortified occupation tanks devouring Palestinian areas with one aim which is to crush all property along in its way and causing a lot of pain, agony and mass destruction behind it. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people have shown great stamina, resolution, persistence and strength facing these appalling conditions, and their lives have resumed in one way or another in the midst of this huge merciless turmoil.

The Internal Situation

The period witnessed major decline in the development and reconstruction process in Palestine. This would add to the political crises that reflected negatively on the Palestinian position regarding the whole political process.

As will be demonstrated later, when discussing opinions expressed by citizens during Town Hall meetings, a state of frustration and despair looms amongst Palestinians who continue to be the victims of deteriorating conditions with the stalemate in the Peace Process and additional deepening of the economic crises. This is complicated by the fact that institutionalization of democratic structures and practices on the internal state-building level is not receiving due attention.

The PNA, while being commended for its many accomplishments, yet had to face harsh, but sound, recommendations of the necessary to strengthening Palestinian public institutions that includes steps to lay the foundations for a healthy public administration system, a strong legal framework and democratic structures, all of which were conducive to an environment of good governance. Amongst the most important changes demand is the need to ensure a pluralistic civil society.

As will be mentioned later on the debate held by ATF on violence in educational institutions, citizens were calling for a concrete and sound national efforts to combat this dangerous phenomenon. Another actions taken by the PNA security organs against freedom of expression have been recorded. These included several arrests of prominent Palestinian personalities who have given harsh statements against the functioning of the PNA and the closure of several local radio and TV stations for various periods of time.

In a positive development, the President of the PNA endorsed the Legislation on non-governmental institutions and charitable societies. Civil society organizations welcomed the step and began efforts to advocate practical and professional regulations and guidelines to put the law in motion.

On the other hand, it was obvious that the uprising caught the PNA by surprise and had demonstrated to a great extent how fragile were the institutions established by the

PNA in accommodating for the urgent needs of the population. For over three weeks in October 2000 work in Ministries and government institutions came to an almost complete halt. While one could understand the ramifications of the crises in light of the magnitude and intensity of ongoing incidents, yet it was difficult to justify the state of paralysis that characterized the functioning of long established departments in areas under full control of the PNA. Once more the issues of sound governance, rule of law, a healthy public administration system and respect for democratic principles were brought to the front as factors that are of equal importance in the national struggle.

The increasing role of collaborators led to the assassination of several Palestinian activists while several collaborators have been arrested and brought to jail and six death sentences have been issued with the execution of two of them.

After six months of the *Intifida*, the Palestinian Legislative Council was able to hold a full session, starting its sixth term by a speech of Mr. Arafat; the speech was distinguished for its high sensitivity to the issue of the rule of law, human rights, and democratic principles. If the attitudes expressed by Mr. Arafat would be translated into real action by PNA institutions, significant improvement could be obtained. The PLC succeed in conducting another two meetings using the videoconference, however all PLC committees fail to met due to roads closure. The shortage of funds and the difficulties of reaching the work place, together with the volatile circumstances led to real weakness on the part of the public institutions and prevented them from providing basic services to the Palestinian citizen .

ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, 2635 persons (206 females and 2429 meals)¹ had participated in forty ATF's program activities, including fifteen LC members, numerous PNA ministers and senior officials, opposition leaders and leaders of NGOs and grassroots organizations. Seventeen different publications have been produced and distributed². For wider effect, all of the public activities were broadcasted on Al Quds Educational TV and local TV channel. Official Palestinian TV has also covered some of our activities. Local newspapers have widely covered reports on the activities³.

The Citizen Rights Center received and followed up 410 citizen rights cases bringing the total number of cases handled by the center since July 1997, to 743.

The process of program monitoring and evaluation has been completed. This included meetings between ATF staff and the Executive Committee and various external evaluation meetings with PLC members, participants, other democracy and human rights NGOs.

The evaluation report identified the weakness and strength points and highlighted present potentials and future opportunities. It aimed to direct future ATF priorities and interventions.

I. Town Hall Meeting

The objective of this approach is to increase citizen's participation by providing a democratic platform whereby citizens can discuss the issues that are of daily concern to their lives. The process would particularly encourage and consolidate the principle of transparency and oversight between citizens and their local representatives. The approach also helps to contribute to the preparations for local council elections by highlighting the importance of relations between the citizen and his/her representative.

During the year 2001, ATF has organized 8 town hall meetings between citizens and local councils' members. 639 citizens have participated including 112 females.

The current volatile security situation and the restrictions on freedom of movement of people and vehicles in most areas of the West Bank and Gaza prevented the ATF from conducting many of the planned activities. ATF however managed to implement several meetings. The following is a brief description of the meeting that took place during the reporting period:

Citizens of each local council have had the opportunity to discuss their affairs and concerns with PLC and city council representatives. For maximum benefits, representatives of other ministries and public departments were invited to respond to specific issues that were raised by citizens.

¹ This figure represents participants who actually record their names in the attendants sheet .

² For a full list of our publications, please visit our website at: www.multaqa.org

³ For a videotape copy, please contact ATF.

Present on the meeting were the Mayors and members of the municipal councils in addition to representatives of some line ministries and some PLC members, four ministers has been participating including: Saeb Erekat, Minister of Local Government, Rafiq Natshe Minister of Labor, Metre Abu Eita, Minster of Tourism, Azam Al Ahmad, Minster of Public Works, Ezziddeen Al-Sharif, Governor of Tulkarem, Moufid Abed Rabbo, PLC member, Hassan Khreisheh, PLC member, Mu’awiyah Al-Masri, PLC member, and seven mayor and Local council members.

Citizens raised several issues related to their local concerns as have notional dimensions. The issue of common concerns includes.

- The need to handle shortages in electricity supply.
- The need to hold future meetings between the council and citizens.
- The need to establish neighbourhood committees to foster citizens’ involvement.
- PNA role to compensate for damages in civilian property due to Israeli bombardment of some residential neighbourhoods.
- Citizens’ claims of unfair and unequal application of municipal decisions.
- criteria used by the council in streets zoning.
- Environmental hazards due to the existence of the industrial zone amidst residential areas.
- Citizens’ concern on the shilling between Palestinians and the Israeli army and measurement taken or proposed to be taken against the Israeli closure and closed roads and the damage to the Public services and equipment such as the streets, telephone and the streets cleaning containers.
- The increasing parking problem and the need for creative solution.
- Zoning, planning and building permits including conditions and requirement for new constructions.
- Lack of coordination between the Municipalities and other institution such as the Police and Ministry of Local Government.
- The nature of the work of the “emergency committee” established after the Intifada.

Meeting took place in Bitunia, Al Bireh, Ramalla, Beithlehem, Nablus, Nussirat refuges camp (Gaza), Jericho and Tulkarem.

Town	Date	No. of Participants		Total
		M	F	
Bitunia	13/5/01	120	12	132
Al Bireh	10/2/01	90	11	101
Ramallah	14/2/01	65	35	100
Bethlehem	16/6/01	46	12	58
Nablus	10/11/01	44	11	55
Nussirat/ Gaza	27/10/01	30	21	51
Jericho	29/12/01	77	8	85
Tulkarem	03/11/01	46	12	58
Total		518	122	640

II. Public Debates, Workshops and Special Meetings:

During the report, periodical ATF has organized.....public debates.....

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, 75 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 work shops and Symposia
- Dialogues with the political parties
- Town Hall Meetings
- Public debates

To further achieve ATF's dedication and commitment to a participatory Palestinian democratic society, various , 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 of the Palestinian leadership and public. The main principle behind these meetings is to put action sought after concepts by demonstrating the benefits of actual involvement in the democratic process.

The current volatile security situation and the restrictions on freedom of movement of people and vehicles in most areas of the West Bank and Gaza prevented the ATF from conducting many of the planned meetings. ATF however managed to implement one meeting. The following is a brief description of the meeting that took place during the reporting period:

Symposium: Current challenge

Several issues related to the current situation has been raised in particular; the obstacles facing the peace process, the citizens hardship under the current circumstances and the requirements for the state building efforts including the democratic reforms.

Present were Chief of PRCS in Gaza, *Dr. Haider Abdel Shafi* , *Ibrahim Ghabash*, lecturer, political science – Al Azhar University, *Abdel Karim Ashour*, PARC, Gaza.

Special paper by Dr. Abdel Shafi was prepared and it was published on the ATF Periodical Journal.

Public Debate: The Role of International Organizations in Protecting Palestinian Citizens

The debate aimed to analyze and assess the role taken by international human organizations particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on providing aid and protection to Palestinians suffering because of Israeli shelling, siege and closure of Palestinian areas. It also sought to outline steps and actions taken by Palestinian line ministries and civil society organizations to follow up ICRC activities as mandated by international humanitarian laws.

The debate was attended by representatives of the Executive and Legislative Authorities, Democracy and Human Rights organizations and civil society leaders.

Keynote speakers included *Qadourah Fares*, PLC member and representative of the Ministry of Prisoners, *Mohammed Al Almay*, Director, Palestinian Red Crescent Society, *Ahmad Al Sayyad*, Director, Mandella Institute, and *Naser Al Rayyes*, Lawyer, Al Haq Institute. An invitation was addressed to the Director of IRCC in the West Bank and Gaza. He apologized however for not being able to attend and asked ATF to provide the organization with the debate outcomes.

Special Meeting: Palestinian Human Rights Organizations

Special meeting held to assist in improving and strengthen professional coordination and networking amongst active human rights organizations to better serve citizens and to suggest mechanisms to avoid duplication of interventions.

Representatives of several human rights organizations and the Ministry of NGOs Affairs participated in the activity.

Special Meeting: Drugs Proliferation Phenomenon in East Jerusalem

A special meeting was held to discuss the draft research documents on drugs in East Jerusalem. The findings of the research were presented to a group of twelve professionals representing civil society organizations working in the field to assess the research and to outline any deficiencies before being sent for publication.

The field research, the first of its kind, described current situation, outlined field work statistical results and recommended possible interventions to be adopted by civil society institutions to help face this dangerous phenomenon which influences an important proportion of citizens in the city.

Public Debate: Prospects and Scenarios for the Coming Period

The debate aimed to provide the Palestinian citizens with a platform to openly and democratically discuss and assess the political goals and objectives of the coming period with high ranking political representation. It served to involve citizens in the national decision-making and to create a state of a civil dialogue on critical issues.

The debate representatives of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Authorities, political parties, grassroots organizations, senior public figures, and civil society leaders, participated in the activity.

Keynote speakers included *Ahmad Abdel Rahman*, Secretary, PNA Cabinet, *Marwan Barghouty*, Secretary, Fatah's Movement Higher Committee in the West Bank, *Hasan Yousif*, Hamas Representative and *Abdel Rahim Mallouh*, Politburo member, PFLP.

Public Debate: The Ability of the Health Care Services to Face the Existing Challenges

The debate discussed the difficulties facing the health services during the current crisis and addressed some methods for increasing the level of efficiency of their services. The need for greater coordination between official and civil institutions in order to increase efficiency was one of the main recommendations.

The participants included *Fayeq Hasan* (Red Crescent), *Mousa Abu Hamed* (Hospitals Director General), *Mustafa Bargouthi* (PNGO), *Azmi al-Shua'ybi* (PLC Member).

Public Debate: Rehabilitation of the Handicapped

The debate sought to establish contacts between various parties working in the field of rehabilitation/handicapped. Participants evaluated the main concerns and expressed the need for research aimed at addressing the needs of the handicapped. As a result, a committee was formed representing the different institutions active and will take further steps in addressing the needs and seeking solutions to some of the difficulties encountered.

This debate, brought together *Nadim Tubasi* (Health Care Society), *Wasef Erakat* (Ministry of the Interior), *Mahmoud Kaskas* (Ministry of Local Organizations Affairs), *Iman Deeb* (Ministry of Social Affairs), *Hussein Natur* (Ministry of Local Government), *Juliatt Mitri* (Ministry of Local Government), *Shifa'a Sheka* (Ministry of Education), and *Majed Arrouri* (Palestinian Human Rights Commission), *Ziad Amer* (General Union for Physically Disabled), *Isam Aqel* (Palestinian Union for Local Government).

Symposium: Promoting the Role of Civil Society

This meeting assesses the popular efforts conducted by civil society organizations in tackling the challenges during the current *Intifada*. Suggestions were raised on how civil society activities may alleviate and provide solutions to some of the hardships faced by the Palestinian community. A special position paper has been prepared based on this discussion and distributed to the concerned parties.

This meeting attended by, *Atallah Hanna* (The Orthodox Patriarchy spokes person), *Saker Habash* (Fateh Central Committee), *Abdel Fattah Hamayel* (PLC Member), and *Islah Jad* (Professor at Beir zait Uni.).

Discussion of the Third Democratic Formation Report

The ATF's Board of Trustees discuss the Report on Democratic Formation in Palestine . Fourteen members of ATF's Board of Trustees were present.

Additionally a press conference was held to present the findings of the ATF annual report *Democratic Formation in Palestine*. Participants evaluated the main findings and expressed the need for further research aimed at addressing reforms on the performance of the Palestinian institutions and the needs and solutions for some of the difficulties encountered in the development of the democratic process. The meeting received wide press coverage the next day.

Roundtable Discussion: Evaluation of *Intifada*

The meeting evaluated Palestinian performance during the *Intifada* and suggested ideas on avoiding some of the negative practices taking place. A special position paper has been prepared as a result of this discussion and distributed to the concerned parties.

This meeting attended by *Abdel Raheem Malouh* (PFLP, Political Office), *Marwan Borghouti* (Fateh), *Ahmad Ghneim* (Fateh), *Bassam Salhi* (People Party), *Rakad Salem* (Arab Front), *Ghassan Khatib* (People Party), *Ahmad Majdalani* (Struggle Front), and *Hanan Ashrawi* (PLC Member).

Public Meeting: Pharmaceutical Industry

The meeting analyzed the situation of the pharmaceutical industry in the Palestinian territories and outlined the specific problems encountered. It was decided that there is need for research to be conducted to further assess the needs of this sector.

This meeting included *Dr. Waleed Abdallah* (Director General for Pharmaceutical Affairs in Ministry of Health), *Dr. Mohammad Jadallah* (Medical Union), *Dr. Umayeh Khamash* (UNRWA), *Subhi Abu Shaera* (Ministry of Supplies) and *Maen Farhat* (Ministry of Supplies).

Symposium: Education in Jerusalem

The meeting discussed the results of research conducted by the ATF on this subject and assessed the obstacles facing the education sector in Jerusalem. There were constructive criticisms and recommendations aimed at improving the sector as well as to more efficiently meet the demands of the educational system in Jerusalem.

This meeting included *Taher Nammari* (Educator), *Sa'ad Kaddumi* (Director General, Ministry of Education) and *Sammer Jibril* (Deputy Director of Education, Jerusalem).

Roundtable Discussion: Monitoring of Settlement Activities

The roundtable discussion analyzed the implications of the Mitchell Report on the future of the peace process and examined the possible mechanisms for Palestinians to

observe and to enforce the settlement freeze. A special position paper has been prepared on the basis of this discussion and distributed to all parties concerned.

Among the participants were *Qais Abdel Karim* (Democratic Front), *Bishara Daoud* (PLC Member), *Marwan Bourghouti* (PLC Member), *Khalil Toufakji* (Settlements Expert), *Sa'eb Nassar* (Ramallah Governaret) , *Salah Hanieh* (Meftah).

Public Meeting: Public Opinion Polls

The discussion aimed to evaluate the work of Palestinian institutions conducting public opinion polls and to assess the positive and negative implications of the duplication of many of the polls. Suggestions were made on more efficient means of coordination between organizations active in this field.

Speakers included *Nader Sa'ed* (In Charge of Opinion Polls at Bier Zait Uni), *Nabeel Kokal* (Head of Opinion Polls Center) and *Faisal Awartani* (Expert).

Public Debate: Meeting with Jerusalemite Journalists .

This debate discussed the difficulties that the Palestinian journalists based in Jerusalem are facing during this current crisis and addressed some methods for increasing the level of efficiency of their services. The need for greater coordination between Jerusalem journalists and the Palestinian Journalists Association in order to increase efficiency was also encouraged. It was agreed to continue this effort in order to establish means for more efficient work. ATF will facilitate this effort

The debate attended by *Naeem Tuobasi* (Head, Journalists Union) , *Zaki Abu Halaweh* (correspond Al- Quds newspaper), *Muna Kawasmi* (correspond Al- Ayamm newspaper), *Suhad Abdel Lateef* (correspond Wafa news agency).

Workshop: Poverty in Palestine

The workshop assess the poverty status during the *Intifada* and suggested ideas on avoiding some of the negative effects. A special report has been prepared and will be distributed to the concerned parties.

The workshop speaker includes *Hassan Abu Libdeh* (Director General: PCBS), *Aatef Alawineh* (Deputy Minister of Finance), *Muhammad Shtiyeh* (Director General, PECDAR) *Muhammad Ghadieh*, General Director, Ministry of Planning), *Abdullah Hurani* (General Research Director, Ministry of Social Affairs), *Azmi Shua'bee* (PLC member). *Abdel Raheem Malouh* (PFLP, Political Office), *Marwan Barghouti* (Fateh).

Public Meeting: Civil Society Organizations in Jerusalem

The meeting analyzed the situation of the Palestinian CSOs working in Jerusalem and outlined the specific problems encountered. It was decided that there is need for research to be conducted to further assess the needs of this sector.

This meeting included *Abdel Kader Khatib* (Orient House), *Saqer Salaimah* (al-Quds University), *Nabeeh Owaideh* (Orient House), *Yousef Hamed* (Journalist), *Rif'at Nasser Eddin* (Jerusalem Electric Company), *Yacoub Odeh* (Arab Studies Society), *Samir Qerish* (Engineers association), *A'del Rwished* (al-Quds University), *Ahmad Maslamani* (Union of Health Work Committees), *Mahmoud Taha* (Education department), *Rafiq Al – Hussein* (Welfare Association), *Mahasen Nasser Eddin* (Al-Haqauaty Theater), *Samir Jibreel* (Education department), *Amneh Badran* (Jerusalem's Women's Centre).

Public Meeting: Policy of House Demolition in Jerusalem

This brainstorming meeting discussed the Israeli house demolishing policy which has been drastically increased recently when the Israeli authorities demolished 25 housing units within a two-week period. The participants assessed the obstacles facing the housing sector in Jerusalem. There were criticisms over the Israeli policy regarding both the demolition practices and the denial of issuing building permits.

Two meetings attendants included *Dr. Nimer Ismaeel* (Director General :Ministry of Jerusalem), *Abdel Lateif Gaithe* and *Fadel Tahboub* (Political Activists), *Muhammad Abu Hartieh* , *Ibrahim Al-Julani*, *Zaki Abu Halaweh*, *Rana Bushara*, *Rania Nassar*, (Representatives of civil society organizations)

This discussion analyzed the implications of the demolition policy and civil society institutions role in assisting in solving the problems faced by the victims. The recommendations were formulated and disseminated to the concerned parties.

Workshop: Zoning and Land use in Palestine

The workshop was conducted in order to respond to several complaints received by the CRC| on the difficulty in obtaining building permits due to the lack of zoning in the villages surrounding the main cities.

A special paper was presented by the experts participating and there has been a request to the ATF to compile this paper in a special issue. ATF is considering this request.

Symposium:House Demolition

Key Speakers

- Adnan Abu Ayyash, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Housing
- Waleed Hamad, Mayor of Al-Bireh
- Abdel Raheem Taha, Parliamentary Research Unit, PLC

Symposium: Mechanisms for Developing Palestinian Health Services

Key Speakers

- Bassem Al-Remawi, Ministry of Health
- Kamel Zainah, Union of Palestinian Health Work Committees
- Fa'eq Hussein, Palestinian Red Crescent Society
- Waleed Obeidallah, Ministry of Health
- Bassem Al-Remawi, Ministry of Health

- Kamel Zeinah, Union of Health Work Committees
- Wael Abu Arafah, Urologists Association
- Bassam Abu Libdeh, Al-Makassed Hospital

III. Live Televised Debates

Since the *Intifada* began in September 2000, and the ensuing closure of the Palestinian territories, the ATF has started broadcasting live television debates, with viewer call-ins, on key issues in Palestinian society. Since the closure has nearly paralyzed movement between Palestinian villages and cities, this allows for a broader form of audience participation, by having viewers from isolated or remote areas including the US, Jordan and Kuwait, thereby enhancing the quality of the debates. The ATF has received a great deal of positive feedback from these activities. In fact, according to a poll conducted by Watan TV, audiences preferred ATF programs over the others.

Mechanisms to Implement the Refugees Right of Return.

The debate sought to examine various mechanisms to guarantee a workable solution to the question of Palestinian refugees. The meeting also focused on raising the awareness and level of involvement of Palestinian citizens in the decision making process in the political sphere.

The debate included *Saji Salameh*, General Director, PLO Refugees Department and *Qaise Abdel Karim*, Politburo Member, DFLP. Additional speakers were called by phone to solicit their feedback including *Salman Abu Sitteh*, expert on the refugees' question, PLC members *Husam Khader* and *Jamal Al Shati*, and *Mohammed Abu Hartheyeh*, Director of AL Haq Institute.

New Concepts in the Final Status Negotiations

The debate aimed to provide the Palestinian citizens with insights on critical concepts being used and circulated throughout the final status negotiations such as final settlement, creative solution to the refugee crises, permanent settlement etc. It served to involve citizens in the national decision-making and to create a state of a civic dialogue on critical issues.

The debate included *Sakher Habash*, Secretary, Fath Revolutionary Council, *Said Zeidani*, General Director, The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights and *Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah*, President, the Arab Thought Forum. Additional speakers were called by phone to solicit their feedback including *Kamel Abu Jaber*, former Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Faisal Al Hussein*, member of the PLO Executive Committee and *Nafe' Hasan*, Professor of Law, Al Quds University.

On the Eve of Israeli Elections

The debate aimed to analyze and assess the implications of the Israeli elections on the peace process and to discuss future political scenarios in light of its possible

outcomes. It also served to observe how internal democracy functions in Israel at this critical juncture.

The debate included *Ghassan Al Khatib*, Director, JMCC, *Mahdi Abdel Hadi*, Director, PASSIA and *Abass Abdel Haq*, Vice President, the Arab Thought Forum. Other speakers were called by phone to solicit their feedback including *Ziyad Abu Amer*, Chairperson of the PLC Political Committee, *Mohaamed Brakeh*, member of the Israeli Parliament, *Abdel Rahman Abu Arafeh*, President, ATF and *Nabil Amro*, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Role of Women on the Discussion Making process

The debate represent ATF contribution to the Democracy day Campaign and aimed to analyze and promote the issue of women participation at the decision making level. The discussion clarify the obstacles and means needed to over come the low profile of women participation.

The debate included *Zahira Kamal*, Executive Director of the MOP, *Dr. Ilham Abu Gazala*, Professour at Beir Zeit University and *Mrs. Salwa Abu Khadreh*, Chairman of the Palestinian Women Union.

Other speakers were called by phone to solicit the input including; *Mrs. Lila Khalid*, Key member of PFLP, and *Mrs. Khalida Jarara* of Admeer Center.

The Role of the PLC During the Current Crisis

The debates represent ATF contribution to the Democracy Day Campaign and aimed to analyze and assess the role of the PLC during the current crisis including the legislative process, role of law, and dealing with emergency conditions.

The debate included *Azmi Suaibe*, PLC, *Ahmad majadalani*, Political activist (currently preparing research on the subject).

Other speakers were called by phone to solicit their inputs including; *Mr. Mohammad Subieh*, Vice speaker of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), *Mr. Ibrahim Doegmeh*, head of Diwan Alfatua at the Ministry of Justice, *Mr. Ibrahim Abu AL Naja* PLC 1st speaker deputy and *Mr. Abdel Kareem Abu Salah*, head of Legal Committee.

The Aftermath of Israeli Elections

The debate aimed to analyze and assess the ramifications of the Israeli elections on the peace process and to discuss future political scenarios in light of the election of right wing leader Ariel Sharon. It also sought to outline aspects of the Palestinian future strategy in that regard.

The debate included *Azmi Bisharah*, member of the Israeli Parliament, *Marwan Barghouthi*, Secretary, Fatah's Movement Higher Committee in the West Bank and *Abdel Rahim Malloh*, member of PFLP Politburo. Other speakers were called by phone to solicit their feedback including *Taher Al Masri*, former Jordanian Foreign Minister and *Adnan Abu Odeh*, former political advisor to the Jordanian monarch.

Drug Abuse

The debate sought to examine the spread of drug abuse in Jerusalem based on research conducted by the ATF. Participants stressed the need for a public awareness campaign on the methods to fight against drug abuse. They also suggested the need for greater coordination between official and civil institutions in efforts to stop the further spread of drug abuse.

The debate included *Michael Sayegh*, (Researcher), and *Majed Alloush*, (Director of al-Sadiq al-Tayeb Institute and Treatment Center). Telephone participants included *Fahmi Ekeleh* (Head, Ante Drug Committee), *Issam Tarabieh* (Researcher, Alhilal Anti Drug Committee), *Hatem Abdel Qader* (PLC Members).

Legislation and Judiciary

The debate aimed to outline the main obstacles facing the Palestinian Judicial System and to suggest the necessary steps to establish the basis for a real, independent Palestinian judiciary. The participants also suggested the need to promote public awareness on the necessity of empowering the judicial system in Palestine as a basic requirement in a democratic society. A special position paper has been prepared by the ATF based on these discussions.

The debate included keynote *Sami Sarsour* (*Head of the WB supreme court*), *Ali Muhana* (Deputy of the lawyer Association), *Qadura Fares* (PLC member and representative of the Ministry of Prisoners). Other telephone participants included: *Shukri Nashashibi* (Lawyer), *Ibrahim Barghouti* (Lawyer), *Nasser al-Rayyes* (Al-Haq Society), *Hussein Abu Hunoud* (Lawyer Palestinian Commission), and *Najja Dukmak* (Researcher, Mandela Center).

The Haj

The debate aimed to analyze the shortage of services provided to Muslim Pilgrims participating in the Haj To Mecha . Suggestions were raised for improved services for future pilgrims. It was also recommended to draw to the attention of the relevant institutions and companies the need for an increase in efficiency for the services provided to the Pilgrims.

The debate included *Aziz Amr* (deputy of Waqf Ministry), *Munir Othman* (In charge of the Haj mission)*Khadel Abu al-Halwa* (Representative of the transport companies) and *Tahar Namari* (Participant at the last Haj mission).

The Palestinian Naqba

The debate, which was part of ATF's contribution to the al-Naqba Day Memorial, aimed to draw attention to the 53rd anniversary of the Palestinian Naqba and to create awareness and emphasize the lessons learned to date on the need for establishing a lasting and just peace.

The debate eve of al-Naqba Day, included *Dr. Nafe'e Hasan* (Professor at Al-Quds Uni.), *Dr. Salah Abdel Jawad* (Professor at Beir Zait Uni.), *Dr. Mohammad Muhareb*

(Researcher), *Abass Abdel Haq*, (Vice President, the Arab Thought Forum), and *Ismat Shaksher* (Lecturer at Al-Najah Uni.).

Role of Newly Established Municipalities Under the PNA.

The debate outlined the results of the research conducted by the ATF and evaluated the developments of the newly established municipalities. It further stressed the need for regulations and measures necessary to promote and increase the capacity and services of the concerned municipalities.

The debate, included *Dr. Husein Araj*, (Deputy Minister , Ministry of local Government), *Abdel Fattah Hamayel* (PLC Member), *Issam Akel* (Palestinian Local Government Council), and *Nasser Yacoub* (Researcher at CRC). Telephone participants included *Abdel Qader Abu Hammad* (Mayor of Samm'ou), and *Eid al-Abadleh* (Mayor of Qararah).

The Closure

The debates discussed the hardships Palestinians experience as a result of the Closure implemented by the Israeli Occupation forces and suggested steps to be taken by the formal and informal sector to draw attention this problem.

The debate included *Azzam Alahamd* (Minister of Public Work), *Hussein al-Sheikh* (Fateh Activist) and *Albert Agazarian* (Beir Zait Uni.). Other participants by phone-in included *Ali Qawasmi*, (Minister of Transport) and *Hassan Barghouti* (Head of workers NGO.).

The Mechanisms for Monitoring Settlements

The debate disseminated the outcome of the previous roundtable discussion on settlements organized by the ATF that emphasized the implementation of the Mitchell Reports particularly after the period of ceasefire. Critical feedback was received on this subject.

This debate included *Qais Abdel Karim* (The Democratic Front), *Khalil Tufakji* (Expert on Settlements) and *Salah Hanieh* (Miftah). Other participants solicited by telephone call in included *Salah Tamari* (PLC Member, Head of Settlement committee) and *Izzadine al-Sharif* (Governor of Tulkarem).

Pharmaceutical Industry

The debate sought to examine the readiness of the health service needed to meet the increasing demand resulting from the high casualties during the current violence. In particular, the debate focus on the availability of certain medicine needed for special cases. The capabilities of the local drug industry were although discussed to examine ways to respond to the needs. As a result it was recommended that special research would be needed to further examine this need. ATF is preparing for conducting the research. The participants also suggested the need for greater coordination between official institutions and the private drug industry.

The debate included *Walid Obeid Allah* , (General Directed, Ministry of Health) , and *Mohammad Masruji* Head, Union of drug factories, in addition to 8 Telephone participants .

Future of the Secondary School Graduates

The debate aimed to outline the main obstacles facing the secondary school graduates and to suggest the necessary steps to assist and facilitate their advanced education. The participants also suggested the need to promote public awareness on the necessity of vocational education system in Palestine as a basic requirement for development.

The debate included *Hisham Kuheil* (Deputy Minister of High Education), *Muhammad Odeh* (Director of Students Affairs in M.of High Education), *Ibrahim Khreishe* (the Head- Union of Palestinians students), *Nazmi Ju'ebeh* (Professor in Birzeit U.) and *A'mer Kharbatli* (Student). 25 persons were telephone participants.

Greek Orthodox Patriarchal Elections

The debate aimed to analyze the election process and the impact of this important event. Participants also discussed Palestinian unity, in particular the Moslem/Christian relationship was raised. It was agreed that this relationship could be seen as a model of coexistence. Several ideas for joint activities were recommended.

The debate included *Attalla Hana* (Speaker –Greek Orthodox Patriarch, *Ibrahim Qandalf* (President's Advisor for Christian Affairs), *Hasan Khater* (Director General – Jerusalem Encyclopedia), *Mohammed Hussin* (Director General – Al Aqsa Mosque).

The closure of national institutions in Jerusalem

The debate, which was part of ATF's contribution to the closure imposed on several Jerusalem institutions, aimed to create awareness on the need for more cooperation among civil society institutions in Jerusalem to respond to the needs of citizens in Jerusalem.

The debate included *Salah Zukhaika* (Secretary – FATEH Movement Jerusalem) , *Abdel Qader Faisal Hussein* (Orient House), *Zahira Kamal* (FIDA Movement), *Riad Malky* (Political Activist), *Rafik Hussein* (Activist).

Civil society organization performance during the Intifada

The debate outlined the status of the work conducted by the popular groups and evaluated the development of its activities. It further stressed the need for recommendations and measures necessary to promote and increase the capacity and services of the concerned groups. Special paper was prepared based on the debate's outcome, the paper has been circulated to concerned parties, and it will be published on the next issue of ATF Periodical Journal .

The debate included *Azmy Shuaiby* (PLC. Member). *Fathy Darwish* (Director General – Ministry of NGOs Affairs), *Izzat Abdel Hady* (Member of steering committee

PNGO) and over telephone; *Abdel Kareem Ashour* (PNGO – Gaza), *Rana Bishara* (PNGO – Jerusalem).

Palestinian Factions and Current Political Issues

The meeting was held to assess the Palestinian political situation as regarded to the development on the grand and the effect of the Intifada on the Palestinian issue, representative of the main political faction participated including:

Key Speakers :

Marwan Barghouti / Fateh , Hassan Yousef / Hamas , Saleh Ra'fat / Fida, Qais Abu Laila / DFLP, Abdel Raheem Malouh / PFLP, Ahmad Sa'dat / PFLP (speech read by one of the participants) , Wasel Abu Yousef , Ahmad Majdalani / Popular Struggle Front , Representatives of other political factions.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Third General Report Democratic Formation

Both the Arabic and English versions of the third General Report on the “Democratic Formation in Palestine” has been issued, the report covered the year 1, January to 31, December 2000. the report covered three 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 twelve months period.

The report considered as an essential sourcebook on the subjects by outlining the areas where positive results were achieved and to list others where additional interventions and hard work ought to be done to improve democratic building efforts.

In an effort to enhance an internal participatory approach in drafting the report, a special meeting was held for members of ATF's Board of Trustees to discuss the drafted report. While commending the huge effort and sound approach, several recommendations and observations were made by participating members on different parts of the report. Effort is being made to issue report No. 4 which cover the year 2001.

Drug Abuse in East Jerusalem

In response to an appeal made by several Palestinian NGOs, ATF organized several study sessions with a group of specialized NGOs to discuss and analyze the phenomenon of drugs proliferation in Jerusalem which increased to the extent that endangers the wellbeing of so many citizens in the city.

In this context, ATF was mandated to conduct a field research to study the extent of this problem and to advise ways through which civil society organizations could coordinate efforts and mobilize resources to combat the phenomenon.

Further more, a special committee has been formed to work against drugs addiction in East Jerusalem. Members include the Orient House, Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs, Jerusalem Governor, the Arab Thought Forum, Good Friend Society, the Old Jerusalem Center for Counseling and Al Huda Society. In a public meeting held in Jerusalem on the occasion of the International Day to Combat Drugs, ATF has presented the main speech.

The research on the phenomenon of drug proliferation in East Jerusalem has been published in March 2001. the draft was discussed in a special meeting before being sent for print, as a follow-up special workshop has been conducted to assess the finding and proposed actions.

The study showed that the highest rate of drug addiction is found among the 20-22 years age group, reaching 32%. The approximate number of addicts in Jerusalem was put at 5,000 all males, or 2.4% of the total Arab population of the city. It was not possible however to define the number of women drug users in the city, because the prevailing traditions and social mores made it difficult to reach them.

Substances, in all their dangerous varieties are widespread at different levels in all parts of Jerusalem without exception. The highest of these rates is found in the Old City, where it reaches 16% of the sample.

The recommendations include three tracks, namely preventing, treating, and fighting drug abuse:

- Preventing drug abuse: there is a need to establish a center specialized in the prevention of drug abuse with the aim of organizing various scientific studies, collecting statistics, and conducting comprehensive awareness campaigns.
- Treating drug abuse: to activate current treatment centres, raise the level of cooperation among these centres, train the professional staff in the needed scientific knowledge and skills, develop rehabilitation and curative plans by enhancing focus on psychological and social aspects with the aim of modifying the behaviour of persons under treatment, and raise their level of adaptation to the society. The centre should be established in a location near Jerusalem, away from crowded residential areas, to treat and rehabilitate drug users. The centre should be equipped with curative and rehabilitative needs.
- Fighting drug abuse: the need for a clear and candid text in the law in regards to growing, manufacturing, distributing and abusing drugs in Palestinian society, with the aim of restricting the spread of this phenomenon.

Medicine Security in Palestine

In an effort to assess the shortage on medicine due to the increasing demand resulted from the Israel violence, ATF has concluded special research.

The Research sought to examine the readiness of the health service needed to meet the increasing demand resulting from the high casualties during the current violence. In particular, the research focus on the availability of ceria medicine needed for special

cases. The capabilities of the local drug industry were although examined to respond to the needs for conducting the research. The need for great coordination between official institutions and the private drug industry was one of the main recommendations. The finding of the research has been discussed in a special workshop.

Palestinian Education Sector in Jerusalem

In an effort to assess the situation of the Palestinian education sector in East Jerusalem that is mainly run by civil society institutions, ATF has contracted an external researcher to conduct a needs assessment research. The document should describe current situation, outline impediments and recommend possible interventions to be adopted by civil society institutions to help upgrade this sector which influences almost every single Palestinian household in the city.

The research on the Palestinian education sector in East Jerusalem has been published in February. The finding of the research has been discussed in a special workshop.

Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh

Two issues No. 23 and 24 of Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh , the Quarterly Journal of ATF, has been published in the reporting period. The eight, nine, ten and eleven quarterly reports on the Democratization Process in Palestine were part of the major contents.

Authores of Articles including : Ahmad Abdel Rahman, Haidar Abdel shafe, Naser Rayyes , Abas Abdel Haq, Michel Saigh, Ingrid Jaradat, Jad Ishaq, Izzat Abdul Hadi and Adnan Amer.

ATF's Newsletter (Al Multa2qa)

Two special issues of ATF's Newsletter, Al-Multaqa were published during the reporting period. The publication covers the development of the Intifada and issue related to it. The publication has been widely circulated locally and internationally.

Periodical Information Sheets

18 *Monthly Information Sheets* on the democratic formation in Palestine were compiled during the reporting period covering April 1999 – December 2001.

The sheet aims to provide the reader with information on the works of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the PNA that are of relevance to the democratization process. Additionally, the sheet has formed a baseline data for the quarterly reports on democratic formation in Palestine.

Simplified Legislation

1. Local Government Councils law. Draft ready, will be published when a decision is taken by the PNA to hold local elections, 2001.

2. Local Councils Elections laws. Draft ready, will be published when a decision is taken by the PNA to hold local elections, 2001.

Citizen Rights Center

ATF's Citizen Rights Center has received and followed up 410 Citizen rights cases during the reporting period bringing the total number of cases handled by the center , since July, 1997 till March, 31st 2001, to 743 cases .

Lack of adequate health services provided by the public sector, shortages in educational facilities and poor infrastructures particularly in rural areas and refugee camps.

As noted in the previous Annual report, a notable rise in cases related to the arrests of opposition political activists has been noted. As in similar part cases, most of the arrests were made without due legal process.

Similarly, several cases of misuse of firearms by security personnel and civilians, which lead to several deaths, have also been reported and followed up.

On analyzing cases filed during the reporting period, it was noted that the majority of complaints raised by citizens during public meetings fell under three main categories.

Legislation Unit

Five publications on legislation to citizens in a simplified manner were completed. They included :

Local Councils Elections laws. (Both will be published when a decision is taken by the PNA to hold local elections).

Resource Center

The Process of developing ATF's Resource Center continued. An electronic database has been established to organize and classify the Center's contents. This will not only facilitate better documentation and safekeeping, but will also help researchers and beneficiaries to better use the facility. Work has been underway to link this database with ATF's web site to facilitate electronic access to users.

Today, the Resource Center contains classified material of 3400 Book , 1150 Documentary, 111 periodicals and 105 video tapes.

Additionally, the process of developing ATF's web site has continued throughout the reporting period. The site has been announced on various search engines. The site's address is www.multqa.org.

Investment In the Future

While the Arab Thought Forum is resuming its continuous efforts and endeavors to strengthen the principles of democracy through involving citizens in the process of decision making, increasing and highlighting the concepts of transparency and the

rule of law, it is fully aware that this effort in spite of its significance is not enough. Consequently, the Arab Thought Forum, realizing that the process of democracy is continuous, started an increase in its activities among youths and secondary schools students since they are the future leaders.

Two years ago and with humble attempts, the Arab Thought Forum embarked in October 2001 on implementing an ambitious program targeting students in all Palestinian secondary schools (total number 531)in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The program consists of three major stages that involve:

- Townhall meetings which aim at convening for a meeting in each one of the sixteen Palestinian Districts. It is expected that 1500 students will attend and participate in the meetings which will include electing representing.
- Two days workshops in which the winners from the first stage will attend. The workshop will include on the election to elect 82 student to participate on the third stage
- A three weeks study camp will be held in the summer vacation in which the winners from the second stage will participate in an intensive training program .

Learning democracy through practice is the basic and essential objective of this program. Through the process of democratic selection, these young men, at an early stage, will not only learn the technical skills of running elections but also the idea of the need for important prerequisites and qualities which make others vote and nominate individuals whom they feel that they have the leadership traits that allow them to represent others. The technical aspect of elections is not an aim in itself, but it is an important means and learning tool to achieve integrity and transparency.

It is planned that the program will conclude its activities during the summer of 2002. At the end of the program, the Arab Thought Forum will put forward a detailed report that covers all the program activities. The program will also be included in the next annual report of the ATF.

Undoubtedly, this very ambitious program will increase and strengthen the desire, accountability and legitimacy of ATF in implementing similar programs or even more ambitious programs. In fact any effort made in this field is actually an investment in the future.

Demolition Of Houses

One of the most apparent features of the Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people since the autumn of 2000 is the clear endeavour to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure whether at the public, or private level. The Israeli army has involved its huge arsenal including bomber jets, helicopter gun ships, artillery and missiles in bombarding Palestinian facilities. The shelling did not differentiate between public and civilian targets since the “Bank of Targets” as named by the Israeli military institution includes thousands of targets that were bombed and destroyed.

The bombardment included civilian houses as well. It is estimated that 2000 houses were completely or partially destroyed by the Israeli arsenal; even the houses of civilians lying within the municipal boundaries of the city of Jerusalem were not safe from destruction. Under the pretext of no building permits, the municipal authorities supported by heavy forces from the police and the army destroy and demolish the houses of citizens after every incident of violence that takes place in the city. Those innocent citizens “scapegoats” are forced to pay their houses as a price for any

retaliatory operation carried out by the Jerusalem Municipality and its disregard of all international conventions and laws.

In order to secure the basic housing rights of those innocent citizens and to help in paying a compensation for these citizens, the ATF has started implementing a study to estimate and determine the needs of those citizens. These will be included in a draft law that administers the process of compensation.

The Arab Thought Forum hopes that this contribution will be part of the Palestinian and international efforts to secure citizens' rights for housing within an appropriate legal framework.

Detention and Arrest

It is probably true that the Palestinian people in this period of time were destined to undergo a harsh and severe conditions and suffering as result of the policies of the consecutive different regimes that ruled over this land. By the same token, it is possible that the Palestinian people are perhaps the only people among all world peoples who suffered most from persecution and confiscation of their freedoms as a result of political reasons. Almost in every Palestinian family at least one of its members was subject to arrest and torture in the detention centres or prisons of these different regimes.

The political process and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994 has constituted a start for a hope that this Authority will turn into a democratic Palestinian State that provides security and safety for its citizens, but the expectations were very disappointing since the Authority did not develop into a full state as a result of the continuous Israeli occupation of most of the Palestinian Territories and as a result of the aggressive practices against the Palestinian people and which have greatly increased its intensity against Palestinians after the Palestinian Intifada.

On the other hand and as a result of internal and external conditions, the Palestinian people did not enjoy the security and safety sought after under that the Palestinian National Authority. Hundreds of citizens found themselves inside Palestinian prisons for political reasons. During their detention period, it was noticed that basic human rights of prisoners were violated starting from the lawfulness of arrest, detention conditions and interrogation methods, which were not free from unjustified violence.

In order to contribute in the achievement of the principle of the rule of law as regards freedom and human dignity of prisoners, the Arab Thought Forum has embarked on preparing a report on the legislative needs which will include the required recommendations on the mechanism of developing Palestinian laws which address the legal and humane treatment of prisoners and detainees and determine the ways to thwart acts of violence and torture against them.

The Disabled

Individuals with special needs comprise a large segment that has been marginalized to a great extent in the society and even in the framework of developed communities. In addition to their physical handicap, they suffer from a psychological handicap as a result of this neglect and indifference towards their special needs.

Palestine at a relatively early stage has put forward a law that addresses the needs of those citizens. This is considered a positive step. In addition, an implementation plan with rules and regulations has been put forward and this is very good. Nevertheless, there wasn't any noticeable change in the condition of this segment. Moreover, their numbers are on the increase as a result of the continuous Israeli assaults and aggression; thousands have been added under this segment. This fact requires a special attention that should be given to them by having special resources to take care of them and rehabilitate them.

In order to contribute in the required Palestinian effort to take care of this segment and to put forward an executive plan for the implementation, the Arab Thought Forum has started a needs assessment study, which will include an analysis of deficiencies and drawbacks in the implementation plan and the reasons, which will deter its implementation and the necessary recommendations.

The Arab Thought Forum hopes that this effort will constitute an appropriate contribution in the Palestinian effort to secure the rights of individuals with special needs

NETWORKING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

General Activities

1. Numerous meetings and other activities were held with local and international democracy and human rights organizations, PNA officials and NGOs with related projects, to follow up Program activities, to discuss and practice professional coordination, and to receive feedback. Additionally, a number of staff attended training courses and symposia.
2. ATF's staff participated and has been active in numerous meetings and other activities with diplomatic, local and international democracy and human rights organizations, PNA officials and NGOs, including the Palestinian Non-governmental network (PNGO), the Orient House, the Palestinian Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN). ATF participated in several meetings held between civil society institutions working in human rights and democracy and various international delegations Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the independent reporter mandated by the UN Commission on Human Rights to monitor the territories and the United Nations Under Secretary for Human Rights. In the meeting with the latter, Ms. Mary Robinson was presented with a special report on human rights violations in Palestine. CRC participated in compiling the section on damages to civilian property. ATF were also active in several ad-hoc committees formed to tackle specific issues related to the current volatile situation in the Palestinian Territories including Jerusalem. The work of these committees covered several areas including the disabled, house demolition, health

issues, tenant and landlord relations, and the issue of international protection and other related program activities.

3. ATF Additionally, met with Mr. Miguel Schloss, Head of Transparency International, while in a visit to Palestine. In addition, ATF coordinated a meeting between Mr. Schloss and members of the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN).
4. Several meetings were held between ATF and the Ministry of NGOs Affairs to assess the need and modalities of conducting training workshops for members of some security organs in issues related to citizens rights.
5. The Trans-Mediterranean Civil Society Summit held in Lisbon. The conference was held under the theme of building civil society cooperation and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.
6. Workshop held by the PNGO Network and the General Union of Charitable Societies to discuss the modalities of implementing the new NGO law. In particular, the workshop which was also attended by representatives of the Ministries of NGOs and Interior, sought to conclude an agreed upon approach which would facilitate the process of registering both new and old NGOs.
7. Special meeting held in Cyprus for the PNGO Network, Network of Palestinian NGOs in Israel (Ittejah), and the Network of Palestinian NGOs in Lebanon. Being the first of its kind the meeting aimed to develop and further coordination amongst Palestinian civil society institutions in the region.
8. Meeting held for the Inter Ministerial Committee on NGOs, ATF's President gave a presentation on the situation of civil society institutions and ways in which cooperation between the public and civic sectors could be developed.
9. As part of its involvement in the activities of the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN), ATF has participated in drafting of a document on code of ethics to be adapted by Palestinian civil society institutions. Additionally, ATF assisted in conducting a workshop on administrative reform in the PNA institutions, held by AMAN.
10. Special advocacy visit to Europe as a member of a team representing the Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO). The tour included meetings with some ministers of the European Union and members of the European Parliament.
11. ATF's staff participated in a special workshop held by the Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO). The workshop aimed to asses

and evaluates the vision, message and goals of the network in view of the current political stage and to advise new strategies to strengthen civil society's involvement in both the national struggle and internal state building efforts.

12. The tenth international Conference to compact Corruption held in Brauge .

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.

Of importance is the ability of ATF to select the most critical issues of concern to citizens and to introduce a democratic platform to deal with them, in a very difficult environment. ATF is helping in sitting a practical example on how to handle citizens concerns through adopting participatory and democratic means.

In this context of attained credibility, came the decision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Palestine and the Ministry of Planning to assign ATF with the task of drafting the first Palestinian National Action Plan on Human Rights. This would include conducting of six workshops in the West Bank and Gaza with the attendance of line ministries' representatives and civil society institutions, and revising of six sectorial plans into a unified national one. It is hoped that President Arafat shall ratify the final draft in December.

Roundtable – Delegation from the Parliament of South Africa

This meeting was held to provide the opportunity for the visiting delegation to meet with representatives of Palestinian human rights organizations. Several political and human rights issues have been raised, including the effect of the current violence on the peace process and the building of the state effects, including the moves towards better democratic performance in Palestine. The meeting was coordinated between the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Arab Thought Forum.

This meeting was held on July 15th , at the ATF office in Jerusalem with the participation of *Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah* (ATF) , *Muhammad Abu Hartiah* (Al-Haq), *Sae'ed Zidani* (PICCR), *Khaleda Jarar* (Al – Dameer), *Ahmad Sayyad* (Mandela) *Ahmad Rwiedy* (CRC) .

Name	Position **	Joined ATF
Abdel Karim Ashour		1993
Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah	Preseident	1982
Adnan Shuqeir	Board Member	1986
Albert Agazerian		1977
Azzam Abu Al soud		2000
Daoud Istanbuli	BOT Reporter	1977
Ezzat Abdul Hadi		2000
Haidar Abdel Shafi		1978
Husam Bader		1978
Ibrahim Edabis		2000
Ilham Abu Gazaleh		1996
Iman Ammad		2000
Ismat Shakhshir	Board Member	1986
Issam Awad		1993
Jad Ishaq		1986
Jeries Al Khouri	Chairman	1978
Kamal Hussouneh		2000
Lama Hourani		2000
Mahdi Abdel Hadi		1977
Mamdouh Al 'Eker		1993
Manauil Hassasnian		2000
Mohamed Masrouje		2000
Mohammed Abbas Abdel Haq	Deputy	1982
Mohammed Omar Yousef		1996
Mueen Kanaan		2000
Nabil Tarazi		1993
Nafeh Hassan		2000
Naila Ayish		2000
Nazmi Jubeh		2000
Omar Gaiadeh		1996
Rafiq Hussein		1996
Sa'id Hussein	Treasurer	1977
Salah Saqqa	Deputy	1993
Samar Nather	Monitoring Committee	1996
Samir Hulleileh		1996
Suzan Arafat		2000
Taher Nammari	Secretary	1996
Walid Mustafa	Deputy Chairman	1996

** Results of the elections conducted on summer 2000 .

Attachment 1: ATF Organizational Structure



