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Setting the Standard Requires Self-Discipline

It is not easy for a non-governmental organization to become involved in the field of democracy and demand its implementation on the level of the homeland. This requires first and foremost, the implementation of democracy on the level of the organization. Without this, the organization is lacking one important element in its demand, which is credibility.

Intended democracy does not only include the general phenomena or slogans, but it means the full implementation of the principals of democratic process including administrative democracy comprised of elections, a mechanism for policy formulation and methods for decision making. It also means accountability that entails monitoring inquires, providing answers and reporting. It also means the provision of transparency wherever necessary, since vagueness and secret agendas contradict with democracy. It also means a sound administration that considers outcomes before formulating a plan, which considers efficiency prior to implementing any activity, which considers team feelings, needs, abilities and participation in the decision making process wherever necessary. Administration also includes financial management with all its requirements for the well being of the administration, the goal and means. In this essence, the process is not so simple. Dedication calls for balance, which requires sacrifice and being able to convey information to all, each according to their responsibilities. It also requires time and effort.

The Arab Thought Forum does not claim that it has achieved all this. However, all the signs indicate that it is in the right direction. In fact, the Arab Thought Forum has been continuous in its contribution for the past 23 years. It is a very significant and positive sign that the Forum maintains its annual Board of Trustees meetings. Another indication of no less importance is that the Forum for its various commissions holds elections. Appraisal and credibility characterize the Forum's annual budgets and its financial reports. In fact, the effective participation in Forum activities by political, intellectual and social leaders is a strong indication of the Forum's credibility; interaction between the Forum and all target groups; confidence between the Forum and its donors and the affection among the Forum team, are all indications that call for reassurance.

Nevertheless, we should not be content or arrogant even though the destiny of non-governmental organizations is stability along with effective productivity.

ATF in a Glance

Programs

Democracy

Since 1994 and more so since 1997, the Arab Thought Forum continues to implement its program for promoting democracy. Besides the process of liberating the homeland, institution building on the foundation of democracy is the difficult challenge facing the Palestinian people at this current sensitive stage. Despite all the obstacles, not excluding serious sensitivities, the Forum works with constancy and its utmost ability and courage to tackle issues that are considered to be at the heart of the democratic process. With the passage of time and the complications of the peace process and with the unexpected extension of the interim phase, the mission is becoming even harder. Elections on all levels, presidential, legislative and local have been stalled. This also applies to several non-governmental organizations. No doubt, this represents a harsh setback even if justifications are given for it.

It cannot be claimed that the judiciary authority is independent. Rather, it is an apparatus that suffers from apparent quantitative, qualitative and reference weaknesses which has caused situations where the law was overstepped on one hand, and where the law was unable to deal with their results on the other. We cannot say that the administrative level is characterized by efficiency. There is also a lack of accountability. Moreover, there are mistakes and there is an apparent improvement. There are serious attempts; however, there are mistakes and a lack of accountability. Several cases of violence were monitored, some in which weapons, torture and physical assault were used. The Authority and its security apparatuses play a role in many instances, but also other sectors of society play a role.

In this unsettling environment the Arab Thought Forum is working on monitoring, observing and pushing forward the democratic process and raising the level of awareness. This is an important method which the Forum dedicates time, effort and capabilities. Monitoring the process of democracy calls for daily efforts, which need daily reviews and analyses according to capabilities and time. The Arab Thought Forum is a pioneer in addressing some of these issues from among the discussions on the general issues which are: generating and directing the public opinion, concluding practical recommendations and suggesting mechanisms for their implementation.

Despite the meetings on the district level, the Arab Thought Forum organized during the period the report was being prepared,

The Peace Process

The defeat of Benjamin Netanyahu and the victory of the Labor Party in Israel headed by Barak has been interpreted in all the arenas as the defeat of enemies of peace and a victory for the peace process. However, one year after the Israeli elections and nine months after Barak took office, it is difficult to see any difference between the two except in their approach. Only very few obligations were implemented. Settlement activities and land confiscation is underway at unprecedented speed as if there was no peace process. The red lines set by Barak after his elections completely contradict with the objectives of the final status phase and preempt the outcomes of these negotiations in a manner that contradicts with the minimum Palestinian demands needed to convince the Palestinian people with the plausibility of the peace process. The general atmosphere in terms of daily actions is still the same. Conventional acts of murder in cold blood of innocent civilian Palestinians by Israeli soldiers and settlers still take place. The swiftness of pulling the trigger in a split second still exists, even if the target is a child or old man or woman. Control over roads and borders and arrests at checkpoints and at international crossings are conducted in the same way as during the peak of the occupation.

Popular Palestinian repression is building up day by day. Despite reports and warnings the Israeli government is only working to acquire more land and to have a share in Palestinian resources and their means of living. Instead of negotiating with the Palestinians and making difficult decisions in favor of peace, the Israeli government allies and signs agreements to guarantee settler ambitions. What we see is that in the face of the entire world, which seeks to achieve peace, a few thousand settlers stand against this strong current, fueled by the Israeli government with means of resisting this current to impose their will, thus endangering the entire region.

The fact that the Israeli government was forced to decide the withdraw its troops from south Lebanon under the pressure of military operations by the Lebanese resistance, while refusing to implement the obligations of peace by withdrawing from Palestinian territories, is considered a call for violence in itself. It also paves the way for taking the path of violence instead of negotiations. However, it is believed that an opportunity still exists and there the hope is that this opportunity will be taken.

In regards to the peace process, the Arab Thought Forum had a central participation represented in organizing the international conference "Palestine at a crossroads: features and identity of the Palestinian entity" which addressed all issues of the final status through discussions and analysis by decision-makers and local and international experts. The Forum put true efforts into this conference represented in the sensitivity of the proposed subjects and in the participants and speakers, in addition to the overwhelming attendance of the three-day sessions of the conference. The conference statements and communiqués expressed the essential need for genuine peace which takes into account the basic requirements of peace, most importantly the minimum requirements of the Palestinian people to achieve

their rights to independence and the establishment of their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Although the title of the conference was “Palestine at a crossroads”, this title is still holds for Palestine is still at a crossroads: Either the road of peace, construction and democracy or the road of conflict and violence.

The Future of Jerusalem

Jerusalem is not only one of the four main issues of the final status talks but is the symbol of completing the peace process. The Arab history of Jerusalem which has extended and continued for thousands of years, the religious and national heritage of the Palestinian people, both Muslim and Christian, the strong Arab Palestinian presence in the city and its geographic location that connects the Palestinian areas, all no doubt make Jerusalem a capital for the Palestinian people. Therefore, any settlement must guarantee this.

Expectedly, Barak included Jerusalem as one of his red lines, thus putting the carriage before the horse. His position is not only including it in his red lines. He is supporting it with action. Immediately after taking office, Barak resumed construction in the settlement on Mt. Abu Ghneim, construction which was frozen by Netanyahu. In this sense he does not only challenge the peace process but also the sentiments of Palestinians in addition to putting their leadership, which seeks peace in a bad position. Barak has even resumed construction in the Ras al-Amud Settlement located in the center of an Arab area. Construction here was also frozen under Netanyahu. Barak resumed construction even though he was aware that some of his ministers participated in demonstrations protesting its construction while they were members of the opposition. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities, through their various municipal and ministerial branches, continue to harass the Palestinian population by banning them from building and through demolishing their houses. They also revoke identity cards and the right of citizenship from hundreds of Palestinians. These authorities continue to impose taxes and to complicate trade. They also continue to destroy the social and economic life of the city. Consequently, many negative social phenomena lay residue in addition to the humiliation of residents at checkpoints and while reporting to government departments particularly in regards to anything related to citizens rights.

Within its limited capabilities, the Forum participated in several activities last year, which targeted several issues of concern for the citizens of the city. On the level of the role of the Israeli Ministry of Interior office and its policy of ethnic cleansing, the Forum discussed a study prepared by the Orient House's Center of Economic and Social Rights. It also prepared a special research on that office in order to explain the work methodology of the office, which aims at complicating the rights of Palestinians in the city.

The Forum, with a group of specialized organizations, also discussed the phenomenon of the proliferation of drugs in the city, which increased during the Israeli occupation after being almost non-existent before the occupation. In this context, the Forum was mandated to conduct a field search to study the extent of this problem, its impacts and the techniques for combating it.

The Forum also cooperated with the Higher Committee of Prisoners in discussing the issue of Palestinian prisoners from Jerusalem who are subjected to special treatment by the Israeli authorities which do not consider

them as Palestinians in any negotiations on them with the Palestinian leadership.

Promoting Development

Development in its socio-economic concept has been the pivot of the Forum's activities throughout the 80's. Gradually and with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, in addition to the increase in the number of non-governmental organizations in this field, the Forum reduced its activities in this sector and restricted them to specific speeches, particularly those related to citizens' rights.

During the period of the report, the Forum carried out several activities of an economic and social nature. The seminar entitled "Made in Palestine: opportunities and obstacles" focused on the obstacles facing the local industry and their impact on the rise in unemployment in light of insufficient organization for importing and consequently the absence of protection for local produce.

The Forum re-discussed the Bethlehem 2000 project as part of the follow up workshop, which was convened by the Forum in the middle of 1998. The second workshop was to evaluate the project after the main celebrations marking the third millenium and to discuss the possibility of benefiting from the outcomes achieved by the project in activating the Palestinian tourism sector.

As long as the economy proceeds in parallel with politics,

The Year in Review

During the reporting period, 2635 persons¹ (206 females and 2429 males) had participated in forty ATF's Program activities, including fifteen PLC members, numerous PNA ministers and senior officials, opposition leaders and leaders of NGOs and grassroots organizations. Seventeen different publications² have been produced and distributed. For wider effect, all of the public activities were broadcasted on AL Quds Educational TV and local TV channels. Official Palestinian TV has also covered some of our activities³. Local newspapers have widely covered reports on the activities.

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 for the second year of the Program has been completed during the first month of the reporting 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 NGOs and USAID Democracy Officer.

The results of the exercise were presented in a special report to ATF's Board of Trustees during its annual meeting on July 23rd, 1999. 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.

The Board also discussed ATF's Annual Report and reviewed programs implemented during the past year. The Board also discussed and approved future plans.

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

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

³ For a videotape copy, please contact ATF.

Programming Environment

The reporting period witnessed a major political shift in Israel with the election of Ehud Barak to lead the Israeli government during the coming four years. With a clear mandate from the Israeli electorate to bring a lasting peace to Israel, this meaningful development should have represented an opportunity to move from the state of stalemate that characterized the Middle East peace process for the past three years. At the time, feelings of hope and anticipation had risen amongst all Palestinians who look for actual steps on the ground to illustrate true commitments to a process they had paid dearly to launch.

As expected, the Palestinian leadership left the issue of declaring an independent Palestinian state open pending the outcome of the new political shift in Israel. “Squeezed” between a deepening economic crisis, a non-delivering peace process and a huge task on the internal state-building level, the PNA could only face problems with a frustrated population if no tangible results were obtained soon.

The Political Environment

The signing of the Sharm Al Sheikh memorandum to finally implement the Wye Agreement brought some hope in moving the peace process with conducting the first redeployment of Israeli occupying forces under the new agreement and the release of 199 Palestinian prisoners. This was slowly followed with the opening of the south safe passage, conducting the second phase of the redeployment of Israeli occupying forces and the release of some additional Palestinian prisoners.

Later on, severe impediments faced the full implementation of the Sharm Al Sheikh Memorandum, particularly with no agreement on the dates and modes of the third phase redeployment and opening of the North safe passage.

The real focus however turned to the ongoing negotiations on the final status issues, with initial plans to conclude an interim framework in February, but postponed later, and as usual, till further Israeli notice!

In this regard, all indications pointed to an extremely difficult process with huge differences in the positions of the parties. That led to moving the negotiations to Washington D.C.

The process has been further complicated with developments on the Syrian track, which may provide Israel with inducements to pressure the Palestinian side to accept additional concessions in fear of marginalizing the Palestinian track.

State Building Effort

The PNA, while being commended for its many accomplishments, it yet had to face harsh, but sound, recommendations of the report presented by the Independent Task Force on strengthening Palestinian public institutions that was sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. The Report called on the PNA to illustrate through concrete deeds its commitment 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 extensive changes demanded by the report was the need to ensure a pluralistic civil society. Most importantly the report perceives good governance as “a necessary condition for the success of the peace process”.

The circulation of a petition critical to the policies of the PNA, drew severe reactions from the authority including house arrests, detentions and threats of further legal action against the signatories. While many did not agree with the stance of the statement, they were in agreement that the PNA measures constituted a clear violation of basic civic rights, especially the right to freedom of expression. The Palestinian Human Rights Council, including CRC, published a press release condemning the arrests.

An alarming increase in physical and verbal violence in the Palestinian society has been noted. This included further physical attacks against PLC members, senior public figures and citizens and their properties at large. 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 effort to combat this dangerous phenomenon.

On February 28th; ATF issued a public statement calling on all Palestinians to act in unity in denouncing and fighting all forms of internal violence which endangers not only basic citizens' human and civic rights but also the core foundations of a civilized society. The statement was widely circulated and received noted attention. ATF has been in the process of evaluating other possible public interventions in that effort.

In a positive, though much delayed, development, 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. Many feared that lack of clarity regarding the roles of the Ministry of Interior and that of Non Governmental Organizations Affairs, might contribute to duplication of instructions and unwanted interference in the activities of NGOs.

Civil society institutions were taking important initiatives to call on the PNA to strengthen the internal front through emphasizing national unity, furthering means of democratic participation in decision making and demonstrated commitment to transparency and good governance.

Activities

Forums

Conferences, Workshops and Symposia

Arab Thought Forum International Conference

Palestine at the Crossroads: Perspectives of Citizenship and Prospects of Identity

The Arab Thought Forum held its first international conference in Birzeit University in the period 21-23 June 1999. Around 500 participants from all parts of Palestine were involved, including guests from foreign countries, representatives from the diplomatic corps and non-governmental organizations operating in Palestine.

The participants included forty-six speakers representing the PLO, the PNC, the Executive Committee, the PNA with its diverse executive, legislative, judicial and security branches, in addition to representatives from Palestinian civil society organizations – parties, public organizations, NGOs and a select number of foreign experts.

The conference sought to contribute in the general effort to build a democratic society in an independent Palestine. During the sessions, the conference discussed the following aspects:

1. Current conditions and future role of the PLO.
2. Performance of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches in the PNA.
3. Status and role of civil society organizations.
4. Relations between the PNA and political parties and their interaction, in addition to the role of the political parties in the Palestinian process.
5. The peace process in both its transitional and final phase issues.
6. The foundations and principles of establishing a modern democratic state in Palestine along with the separation of powers, the role of civil society organizations and the rule of law.

The first and basic conclusion of the conference was the unsound condition of the political process, which was supposed to lead to a state of peace in the

region. The peace process has not only been stalled, but there have been clear attempts by Israel to destroy it altogether. The hard-line Israeli government has wasted three of the five years agreed upon as the interim period. The defeat of the current Israeli government does not guarantee a revival of the process, especially when the government now being formed has not shown any dramatic difference from the previous government.

The consensus emerging from the conference indicated the following:

1. The PLO, which is the sole representative of the Palestinian people, leads the Palestinian struggle and is the framework for representing Palestinians everywhere.
2. The PNA is the actual political project that needs to reform its practices and remedy its existing flaws to become efficient and develop into a state and an integrated political system, thus leading to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.
3. The Israeli Occupation in 1967 is a military colonialist occupation that should be eliminated. Any geographic or demographic changes incurred by the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian lands is considered void and illegitimate, contradicting with international legitimacy and constituting a blatant violation to the Fourth Geneva Convention.
4. All measures and changes undertaken by the Occupation are null and void, and must be eliminated. This includes settlement plans, land confiscation, and control of natural resources. The Palestinians are entitled to compensation for all losses incurred during the Occupation period.
5. The lull in the peace process is essentially due to Israeli intransigence, and its attempt to gain time to impose facts on the ground that are in violation of international law, in particular to UN Resolution 181 and 242, which constitute the basis of the current peace process.
6. In order to achieve a just and viable peace, that can be accepted by the future generations, the final phase agreement should address and resolve the following issues:
 - A. The issue of refugees and the need to implement UN resolutions, mainly Resolution 194 and all other resolutions that stipulate their return to their homeland and houses, and give them their natural right of return.
 - B. Jerusalem, which is the capital of the Palestinian people, lies at the core of Palestinian heritage, religious and physical existence. Therefore, it is the political and sovereign capital of the Palestinian people and state.
 - C. The natural Palestine is one geographical entity; the political borders, which are based on the full Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied on

the 4th of June 1967, including what was mentioned in UN Resolution 181, must not create any obstacle to the movement and activities of the Palestinian people in exercising their legitimate and humane rights all over Palestine, including Jerusalem.

- D. The Israeli Occupation has taken control of resources and properties belonging to the Palestinian people in territories occupied in 1948 and 1967. The Palestinian people, through official institutions are entitled to compensation at real values in order to be able to achieve reconstruction.
- E. The settlements are a cornerstone of the Occupation and therefore must be dismantled as one of the manifestations of this occupation. Their infrastructure should be part of the compensation due to the Palestinian people.
- 7. The Palestinian people, who went through an ordeal of suffering and experiences, represent a human and cultural value that must seek its expression in an independent, sovereign state in the family of nations.
- 8. The Palestinian state needs to contribute in the promotion of world peace, transforming the Middle East into a safe area, where countries engage in equal and full economic relations within constructive neighborly relations in all daily life aspects on principles of cooperation, justice and equality.
- 9. The Palestinian State must be built along modern principles and mechanisms adopting democracy, the rule of law and separation of powers. In addition to the ensuring of public freedoms and human rights and the adoption of modern administration principles in all public institutions.
- 10. National security of the state of Palestine is a matter of sovereignty. National security in Palestine is sacred. All efforts and capacities must be provided to support this security. However, security must not take priority at the expense of the security and dignity of the Palestinian citizen, who faced various hardships in the past decades all over the world. This is the time to make the Palestinian citizen feel proud and dignified on his soil and state.
- 11. A Palestinian State with such criteria must include commitment to principles of justice, transparency and accountability in an atmosphere allowing freedom of thought and expression with equal opportunities to each citizen, regardless of background.
- 12. The state in the final analysis is the expression of the direct and free choice of the people through democratic and honest elections.

13. NGOs and civil society institutions are a crucial part of national life. They should have legal, procedural, moral and material support in order to be able to fulfill their role in accordance with the law.
14. The Palestinian people are the guardians of an enormous historic, religious, natural and aesthetic heritage, which should be preserved. Means to assume this responsibility should be secured.
15. The Palestinian people have sacrificed a lot in order to survive. They have offered thousands of martyrs for the homeland. Despite the fact that political agreement must concert with an appropriate humane conditions, the Israeli occupation is still keeping thousands of Palestinian prisoners behind bars, using them as hostages for negotiations purposes. Their continued detention constitutes a violation to international law. Immediate efforts must be exerted to release them.
16. The Palestinian State is the result of 100 years of struggle, suffering, and experiences. Extending this requires enormous material means that are not available. The international community bears the responsibility of providing the political, financial and moral means to all Palestinians to properly develop their entity.

Appeals

In the light of the deliberations in the conference, and based on the perspectives noted, the conference sends the following appeals:

1. To the International Community and the United Nations:

Resolutions and statements supporting Palestinian rights are insufficient if they are not linked to adequate mechanisms and measures that guarantee implementation on the ground. Basic rights should not be conditional or linked to a balance of power or political deals.

2. To the Israeli People:

The historic decision of the Palestinian people to join the peace process was a result of historic responsibility towards global peace. It is counterproductive for Israel to respond by greedy steps of acquiring land, controlling natural resources, and restricting movement and other oppressive measures. The fact that the Palestinian people accepted the principles of the possible peace at the expense of the just peace must receive all respect and appreciation. There is no doubt that the Israeli government and people bear full responsibility if the current peace process collapses due to stalling and evasion measures.

3. To the PLO:

The PLO remains the leading force in the struggles of the Palestinian people and a political framework of their activities. It also maintained the moral constituents of the people, in terms of their geographical, political and religious dimensions. It is required to assume its role in full, according to its charters and programs, and fulfil its objective of establishing the Palestinian State and the return of refugees and the termination of all forms of Israeli occupation.

4. To the PNA:

The PNA is the arm of the PLO in the field. It is an indispensable part of the PLO. The PNA has the legitimacy and mechanism on the ground. Within this context, it bears a first-degree responsibility of setting the sound principles and basic foundations towards forming the Palestinian State. Therefore, the rule of law, respect of human rights, accountability, transparency and sound administration are necessary elements to ensure the establishment of a proper entity on strong foundations.

5. To the Friends of the Palestinian People:

The intertwined international interests stipulated the development of world alliances that were not mostly to the benefit of the Palestinian people. Despite this, the quantitative and qualitative value of the friends of the Palestinian people is very effective. This opportunity should be grasped to express appreciation to the positions and solidarity of the friendly countries, with special attention to the fact that there remains a lot to be done. Future action must include broadening the framework of those friendships and partnerships so that the Palestinian people can achieve their national project and establish their independent state on their national soil.

6. To the Palestinian People:

Hardly did a people suffer as much as Palestinians. While the Kuwaiti refugees returned home after 45 days and the Kosovars after 80 days, Palestinian refugees, and after 50 years, are still living in their desolate refugee camps.

All these sacrifices must be rewarded. Patience, perseverance and hard work are needed together with commitment, national unity and constructive work towards a better future.

Capital Punishment: between Action and Reaction

The debate was held in Ramallah on April 27th and was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's office, NGOs active in human rights and democracy, various PLC members and citizens. *Mohammed Beshtawi*, Chief Military Prosecutor, gave the keynote presentation.

The debate centered on the present conditions surrounding the use of capital punishment in Palestine. It focused on the need to suspend the use of capital punishment presently, to allow for a careful examination of the Palestinian Authority's record. Past experience has shown that capital punishment is often implemented or halted according to public pressure rather than legal action. The debate further focused on the value of maintaining such a punishment within a global trend towards abolishing it.

Participants focused on the legal and political grounds for capital punishment, cases in which capital punishment has been implemented, incidents in which people's reactions affected legal processes and the implications of abolishing capital punishment. The recommendations of the debate called for a thorough evaluation by the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of the PNA on the use of capital punishment.

Meeting with the Minister of Civil Affairs

A special meeting was held at Citizen Rights Center on April 29th with *Mr. Jamil Al Tarifi*, Minister of Civil Affairs in an effort to clarify the position of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on residency issues. Twenty-one persons from NGOs in the field of human rights and democracy attended.

The meeting addressed the growing number of cases related to residency issues such as the inability of individuals and families to obtain residency permits, unresolved family reunion cases pertaining to returnees and the improper handling of residency documents. The Citizen Rights Center received ten such cases in the last quarter alone. In most cases, the Ministry of Civil Affairs responded that its hands are tied, as the issue is "controlled by the Israeli side." The lack of clear rules and regulations governing residency permits and family reunions was addressed, as well as ways to strengthen professional relations between the Ministry and NGOs.

Mr. Tarifi outlined the Ministry's terms of reference, policies and regulations and suggested practical ways in which citizens could present their claims to the Ministry. The meeting served to provide an open and professional platform for specialized NGOs to present citizens' concerns to the Ministry.

Orient House

While Israelis prepared for national elections in May, the former Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* worked very hard to fulfill his promise of closing Orient House. In the weeks leading up to the election, offices inside Orient House were subjected to harassment and closure by the Israeli army, while government representatives tried to convince the Israeli people that the building posed a threat to the nation of Israel. The incident moved Palestinians, international organizations and governments to outrage. Many individuals and institutions, including the European Union, voiced their support for Orient House and its presence in East Jerusalem.

ATF participated in the campaign of support for Orient House by holding a special debate in early May. Over 50 public figures related to the Jerusalem file attended the debate, including members of factions, civil society organizations, NGOs and religious leaders. The discussion focused on strategies for dealing with closure orders and the role participants could play towards that end. However, as the election came and went, and a new government was inaugurated, the issue disappeared. The incident was a clear example of the Israeli government's attempts to manipulate Orient House for its own purposes.

The Legal System in Palestine

A special debate was held at the City Inn Hotel in Al Bireh on July 28th to discuss and analyze the legislative, legal and judicial elements affecting the process of unifying and developing the legal system in Palestine. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Attorney General's office, the PLC's legal and human rights committees, law organizations, and NGOs representing human rights and democracy issues. Special guests included *Dr. Kamil Mansour*, Director of the Birzeit University Law Center, *Mr. Ibrahim Al Dughmah*, Director of Diwan Al Fatwa, Ministry of Justice, and *Mr. Abdel Kareem Abu Salah*, Chair of the PLC Legal Committee.

The debate outlined the historical development of the Palestinian legal system and mechanisms for unification of the system. Modes of implementing the unification process were also discussed. Participants defined the role that the PLC must play towards achieving these goals.

Tribal Law

A special debate was held on August 18th at the Casablanca Hotel in Ramallah, entitled *Tribal Law Between Civil and Religious Laws*. The debate sought to discuss and analyze various elements affecting the relationship between tribal, civil and religious laws and the implications of that relationship on safeguarding citizens' rights. ATF invited tribal leaders, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the PLC's legal and human rights committees, law organizations and concerned NGOs to participate in the debate. Special guests included *Mr. Ala Bakri*, advocate, *Mr. Mohammed Al A'raj*, tribal law expert, and *Mr. Daoud Al Zir*, PLC member.

The debate illustrated the role of tribal law in Palestine. Participants focused on the relationship between tribal, religious and civil laws and the use of tribal law as a source for legislation. A committee was established to create a position paper, which will be presented to concerned bodies in the PNA.

Special Meeting in Al Mawassi

In response to an appeal submitted by Al Mawassi Local Committee to discuss and address the critical problems facing Al Mawasi citizens, ATF organize a meeting with Chair and members of the local committee and a

large number of citizens. Representatives of Rafah and Khan Younis municipal councils, PNA line ministries, International and local developmental NGOs and local citizens also attended.

Participants thoroughly analyzed difficulties facing citizens mainly land confiscation by Israeli settlers, lack of basic infrastructures in health, education and public services and ways to meet the needs of the local population of 5500 inhabitants.

As a result of this meeting, *Save the Children Foundation* (SCF) announced that it shall implement a package of developmental projects in the area including the construction of a school building, a health clinic and a kindergarten. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture took immediate action to support farmers in the area by drilling new water wells and aiding in marketing of agriculture produce. The Palestinian Medical Relief Committees offered to cooperate with SCF in rehabilitating health services in the area.

Public Debate: Draft Legislation on Local Administration

As a major follow up activity to previously held local councils meetings, where many mayors asked ATF to discuss the draft legislation on Local Administration as proposed to the PLC by the Ministry of Interior, ATF organized a debate to discuss and analyze the draft and to outline the legal, financial and jurisdictional implications of the legislation on authority of local councils. Many felt the draft legislation would undermine the authority of local councils and centralize control and resources with governors.

Attending the debate were representatives of the Ministries of Interior and Local Government, Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), Governors, law institutions, senior public figures, some PLC members, and NGOs concerned with human rights and democracy. Keynote speakers included Dr. *Adnan Amro*, Professor of Law, Al Quds University, Mr. *Aoun Shawwa*, President, Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA) and Mr. *Fakhri Shaqourah*, Chair, PLC Interior Committee.

The debate's recommendations called on the PLC to reconsider the draft legislation with the consultation of APLA. The recommendations were circulated to all PLC members and relative PNA executive bodies.

Workshop: Civil Defense Organ in the West Bank

As one of the most important organs to provide essential civil services to citizens, Civil Defense is a mirror of the capabilities of the Palestinian public administration service. CRC's study sought to survey all civil defense establishments, collect data on personnel and equipment, assess readiness to assist in emergencies and to solicit citizens' perceptions of the Civil Defense Organ.

A workshop was conducted to present research conducted by Citizen Rights Center. Participants included representatives from the Ministries of Interior, Labor and Local Government. Also attending were representatives from the Civil Defense Organ, senior public officials, some PLC members and NGOs concerned with human rights and democracy.

The workshop focused on the field research regarding several incidents throughout the West Bank that delineated the deficiencies of the Organ vis-à-vis poor performance in handling emergencies.

Needs and priorities were identified and recommendations were outlined for PNA institutions in areas where urgent assistance is required to strengthen this institution.

The final recommendations, while commending the research document, called on the PNA to urgently intervene and implement the recommendations of the research and to draw an action plan in order to revitalize this essential organ in the near future. The recommendations were circulated to all concerned parties.

Workshop: Youth Needs in Palestine

In response to an appeal made by UNICEF to a selected group of Palestinian civil society organizations, a workshop was organized by ATF on youth needs. Participants represented the students of five secondary schools in Jerusalem and its vicinity. It aimed to discuss, analyze and point out major Palestinian youth needs as seen by participants. It also included a participatory selection of one male and one female student who would represent the group in a program of dialogues co-produced by UNICEF and the BBC Arabic Service during the coming months on "*Youth for Youth*".

The group identified the following five major themes on youth needs in Palestine:

- Failure to keep religious values
- The pressing political conditions and failure to increase participation of youth in the decision making process.
- The problems of smoking and drug addiction
- Psychological pressures in schools and lack of adequate educational material and non material environment
- Wrong perceptions on coeducation.

ATF perceived this workshop as an opportunity to introduce this distinguished group of Palestinian youths, who were selected according a strict criteria, including demonstrated leadership skills, high academic merits and ability to oral communication, to methods and mechanisms of democratic dialogue and election.

Public Debate: Violence in Educational and Academic institutions

In order to discuss and analyze the increasing incidents of physical and verbal violence in educational institutions and to outline ways in which the violence phenomenon could be dealt with, ATF organized a debate attended by representatives of the Ministries of Education and High Education, Students, professionals, senior public figures, and NGOs concerned with human rights and democracy.

Keynote speakers included Dr. *Walid Mustafa*, Dean of Students Affairs, Bethlehem University, Dr. *Sami Udwan*, Psychology Department, Bethlehem University, Mr. *Muwafaq Al Khatib*, Ministry of Higher Education, and Mr. *Ibrahim Abbas*, Chair, Students Council, Bethlehem University.

Speakers emphasized the need for a national effort to thoroughly debate and highlight mechanisms to combat violence that is seen as a major threat to democratic formation in Palestine particularly in endangering civil rights. The family, educational institutions, government bodies and civil society organizations were identified as social bodies responsible to combat violence.

In a follow up effort and in light of the increasing number of violent acts committed by citizens and some official organs, ATF is currently evaluating the need to adopt the theme of non violence in its future town hall meetings.

Study Session: The Future of the Economic System in Palestine

ATF conducted a special study session on for a group of economic experts. The group included Dr. *Atef Alawneh*, Under Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Dr. *Samih Al Abed*, Under Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Dr. *Mohammed Shadid*, PNGO Project Director, the Welfare Consortium, Mr. *Mazen Sunnuqrot*, President of the Palestinian Food Industries Union, Mr. *Mohammed Al Masrouji*, member of the Palestinian Industrialists Union and Mr. *Odeh Shehadeh*, Director, Palestinian Food Industries Union.

The meeting was conducted to solicit the opinions and views of the participants on major themes to be covered in a research under the above title that might be sponsored by ATF in the future. An outline for the research was drafted at the end of the session.

Workshop: Matrix on Democratic Formation in Palestine

As part of its efforts to monitor and analyze the democratization process in Palestine, ATF had published its first General Report on the subject. Following that, ATF had organized a special meeting for a group of leading Palestinian figures to discuss and evaluate the report and to contribute with views on the state of democratization in Palestine. One major aspect raised by many participants emphasized the need to work on producing a set of measurable indicators to assess the democratic formation in Palestine and which might be included in the upcoming report.

In a follow up step, ATF's Democracy Program Team had recently held a brainstorming session, which concluded with producing a matrix for a proposed set of measurable indicators.

In an effort to consolidate and standardize the matrix, ATF organized a special workshop for a selected group of professionals to introduce the proposed indicators, to receive feedback from participants on the matrix's design, methodology and content. The goal would be to finalize a standardized format of the matrix to serve as an additional, not costly, tool to assess demarcating formation.

The activity concluded with producing a final draft of the matrix that was later on transformed into a questionnaire to assess participants' views on the state of democracy in Palestine. A section on the exercise would be included in the upcoming *Second Report on Democratic Formation in Palestine* planed to be published in April.

Public Debate: Palestinian Elections

This public debate came as a contribution by ATF in the activities implemented by civil society organizations in commemorating the Democracy Day

Keynote speakers included Mr. *Ahmad Abdel Rahman*, Secretary of the Palestinian Cabinet and Mr. *Qais Abdel Kareem*, Member of the Politburo, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The debate aimed to discuss and analyze internal and external factors impeding the carrying out of presidential, legislative and local elections. Of significance was an elaboration on the relationship between the stalemate in the peace process and the internal prerequisites for democratic nation building.

Tow major viewpoints could be identified: the first, represented by MR. *Abdel Rahman* maintained that as long as the national goals of the Palestinian People were not achieved, particularly an independent Palestinian State, then major internal democratic steps would be postponed. Priority is given to the demanding and slow peace process.

Mr. *Abdel Kareem*, on the other hand pointed out the organic relationship between key internal democratic prerequisites such as elections and achieving the Palestinian national goals. He pointed out that a truly democratic and united Palestinian society would strengthen the Palestinian demand for national independence.

Workshop: Made in Palestine

Impediments facing local Palestinian industries particularly the issues of external competition, globalization and role of the PNA in developing a legislative and regulatory environment conducive to encouraging local

investments and to guarantee the civic rights of investors, were key issues discussed in a workshop organized by ATF. The activity sought to outline interventions by both the PNA and private sector to upgrade and protect local investment in cooperation with civil society organizations.

Three major themes were identified as guiding the discussion on challenges facing the Palestinian private sector:

- The modes, mechanisms and levels of implementing the economic agreements between the PNA and other countries including Israel in particular.
- The existing and future economic policies of the PNA including legislation and regulation.
- The globalization process and regional developments.

Keynote speakers included Mr. *Maher Al Masry*, Minister of Economy and Trade, Mr. *Usamah Al Teibi*, Department of Planning, Ministry of Industry, Mr. *Jamal Al Shobaki*, Chair, Economic Committee of the PLC, Mr. *Mazen Sunnuqrot*, President, the Palestinian Food Industries Union, Mr. *Abdel Hafiz Noufal*, General Director of Trade, Ministry of Economy and Trade, and Mr. *Kamal Hassouneh*, private investor.

Participants requested ATF to draw the conclusions of the workshop and to insure their proper circulation and general follow up with relevant parties. In particular several participants raised complaints on specific incidents of civic rights abuses by PNA bodies against local investors and industrialists. ATF will follow these cases with the concerned bodies.

Public Debate: Palestinian Constitution

In cooperation with the National Building Coalition, ATF sponsored a public discussion meeting with the Palestinian Constitution Committee in Nablus. Committee members Dr. *Ahmad Al Khalidi* and Mr. *Kamal Al Astal* provided the participants with an update on the works of the committee in terms of drafting the Palestinian constitution.

ATF Activities on the Issue of Transparency

Eight Palestinian NGOs initiated several preliminary meetings on the issue of transparency. All were in agreement for the need to establish an institutional network of CSOs to work together in coordinating future relevant activities. In a follow up the “Coalition for Accountability and Integrity” has been formed including Miftah, ATF, Palestinian Council on Foreign Relations, Al Mizan, local chapter of Transparency International, Muwatin, Center of Palestinian Research and Studies and Pal Trade.

Political Party Meetings on the Role of Opposition

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. The following are highlights on major activities carried out:

Meeting with NGOs Leaders

ATF met with a group of prominent Palestinian NGOs leaders to discuss their views on the role of Palestinian opposition. The meeting was initiated by ATF in an effort to expand the participation of civil society institutions in the dialogue on the role of opposition political parties in building a democratic Palestinian society.

Participants noted that civil society institutions, particularly NGOs, are taking important initiatives to support the democratization process. At the same time, it appears that political parties, particularly those of opposition, seem to be floundering in a state of fragmentation and anticipation. Meanwhile, the Executive authority is not taking steps to further means of democratic participation in decision-making. The notion of CSOs taking the role of opposition parties has been critically questioned and thoroughly analyzed.

Meeting with Fateh Movement

In the process of consolidating the series of dialogues ATF initiated on role of opposition a meeting was held with Mr. *Uthman Abu Gharbeyeh*, Chief, Political Guidance Apparatus of the Fateh movement. Issues of discussion included Fateh's position regarding the role of opposition and means to enhance a national dialogue amongst political parties including the participation of opposition parties in decision making.

Town Hall Meetings

PLC Members Meet with New Askar Camp Residents

A meeting was held on July 20th in the New Askar Camp, Nablus district. 86 citizens met with PLC members *Kamel Afghani*, *Mu'awiah Al Masri*, *Husam Khader* and *Dalel Salameh*.

The major problem facing New Askar Camp is that UNRWA does not recognize it. To obtain social services, health care and educational facilities, citizens must travel three kilometers to Askar Camp. Citizens expressed frustration and sought the help of representatives in overcoming this tremendous burden on the population. Many stated that they felt neither UNRWA nor the Refugee department at the PLO take their complaints seriously. The issue of political prisoners held by the PNA was also

discussed. Citizens appealed to their representatives to work for the release of the prisoners. Many criticized their PLC representatives for not meeting with and properly addressing constituents' needs.

New series of Town Hall Meetings with Local Councils

This year ATF initiated a series of town hall meetings for local council members to meet with constituents and address issues of concern on the local level. This approach seeks to encourage and consolidate the principle of transparency and oversight between citizens and their local representatives. The new format also helps to contribute to the preparations for local council elections by highlighting the importance of relations between the citizens and their representatives. Nineteen meetings were held during the past six months. In each of the meetings, the respective Chair and council members, some PLC members in addition to representatives of selected line ministries met with citizens. Citizens raised several issues, of importance were the following:

1. Lack of infrastructure projects in the water, electricity and road sectors.
2. Inadequacy of civil defense services.
3. Inadequacy of municipal services provided to shoppers coming from outside, such as parking areas, public toilets etc.
4. Means of strengthening cooperation between citizens and local council members.
5. The high costs of municipal services.
6. Illegal usage of sidewalks by shopkeepers.
7. Lack of space in the municipal schools.
8. Complaints on problems faced with Israeli settlers residing around the localities.
9. The need to separate the industrial zone from the residential areas.
10. The need for the council to properly monitor construction.
11. The need to increase cultural activities in the localities.
12. PNA's policy on the appointment of local councils.
13. Councils plans to pave new roads.
14. Questions on municipal policy toward confiscating private land for public good.
15. Lack of public libraries and public gardens.
16. Poor sanitation services.
17. The need to maintain and develop old downtown.
18. Ways in which citizens could support the noted efforts of some local councils to provide local funding to cover costs of municipal projects.
19. Inadequacy of municipal services in newly established neighborhoods.
20. Land confiscation by Israeli occupation forces.
21. Lack of facilities for the handicapped.
22. Lack of recreational and sports facilities.

Various activities and interventions were carried out by ATF to follow up some of the major issues raised by citizens.

The following table summarizes these meetings:

| Municipality | Date | No. of Attendants |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Toubas | 23/8/1999 | 110 |
| Genin | 31/8/1999 | 52 |
| Tul Karem | 2/9/1999 | 141 |
| Qalqilia | 7/9/1999 | 106 |
| Salfit | 23/9/1999 | 51 |
| Al Bireh | 25/9/1999 | 51 |
| Ramallah | 7/10/1999 | 44 |
| Dahreyeh | 23/10/1999 | 67 |
| Jericho | 27/10/1999 | 275 |
| Gaza | 13/11/1999 | 88 |
| Rafah | 16/11/1999 | 105 |
| Bir Zeit | 17/11/1999 | 42 |
| Dir Al Balah | 20/11/1999 | 69 |
| Khan Younis | 22/11/1999 | 160 |
| Beit Lahia | 30/11/1999 | 95 |
| Dura | 22/1/2000 | 81 |
| Beit Hanon | 9/2/2000 | 84 |
| Yatta | 12/2/2000 | 66 |
| Al Maghazi | 9/3/2000 | 142 |

Research

Future of the Political System in Palestine

The works of the focus group to prepare for the strategic research on the “Future Political System in Palestine”, proceeded throughout the reporting period. The group, which included *Ziad Abu Amro, Ahmad Al Khaldi, Sakher Habash, Jamil Hilal, Abdel Rahim Mallouh and Qais Abdel Kareim*, had finalized the research outline and drew methodology guidelines. Focus is currently directed to select researchers.

Civil Defense Organ in the West Bank

The Field Workers at the Citizen Rights Center carried out a field research on the Civil Defense Organ in the West Bank. The research came as a direct result of several incidents in various areas of the West Bank which, pointed out that there exist severe deficiencies in the Organ as demonstrated in poor performance in handling emergencies.

Being one of the most important organs that provide essential civil services to citizens, the Civil Defense Organ is also a mirror of the capabilities of the Palestinian public administration service. The research sought to survey all civil defense establishments, to collect data on personnel and equipment, to assess readiness to assist in emergencies on to solicit citizens perceptions of the Organ.

On completion of the research document, ATF will conduct a special workshop for all concerned bodies, in the PNA and civil society organizations, to discuss the document that will be circulated in advance. It is expected that the activity will be carried out in November.

Second General Report on Democratic Formation

The Arabic version of the *Second General Report on the Democratic Formation in Palestine* has been sent for printing. The report covered 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 fourteen months period. The English version would be published shortly.

In an effort to enhance an internal participatory approach in drafting the Report, a special discussion meeting was held for members of ATF's Board of Trustees.

As with the first Report, special meetings will be conducted to discuss the outcome of the study with senior officials and public figures that will received the report in advance.

Research on Local Councils

As noted throughout most of the town hall meetings in small to medium sized municipalities, poor and inadequate municipal budgets received utmost attention. It was noted that neither council's budgets correlated with the geographic and demographic characteristics of the local communities, nor did the PNA provide these municipalities with any direct financial aid.

As a follow up activity to the Bir Zeit town hall meeting, ATF staff analyzed the municipality's budget for the past three years and discovered that more than 90% of the revenues went for wages and running costs. There was no possibility for any sound capital investment projects.

The issue was brought to the attention of the Minister of Local Government (MoLG) through a letter with copies to the relevant committees in the PLC, and later discussed with the Under Secretary of the Ministry and representatives of the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA). It was agreed that there was a need to further explore this issue by conducting a case study through selecting 5-8 medium sized municipalities for a thorough examination of their budgets and an assessment of any financial problems.

CRC Field Researchers will carry out this study in the near future pending finalizing an outline and an action plan for the study in coordination with MoLG, which showed genuine interest.

“Israeli Policies and Practices at the Interior Ministry Office in East Jerusalem”

Arab Jerusalem is being subjected to various means and methods of judaization in order to eradicate its Arab feature through persistent measures by the Israeli occupation authorities to alter the geographic and demographic reality of the city and achieve a Jewish majority.

The office of the Israeli Interior Ministry in East Jerusalem, exclusive to Palestinian citizens, assumes the duty of creating inhumane and illegal means in order to judaize the city and impose programmed mechanisms that aim to evict its Palestinian residents.

It is clear that the measures adopted by this office, from the moment the citizen arrives and stands in line until he completes his paperwork is a means of aggravation that is part of a policy aimed to expel Palestinians from their city and homeland.

The Arab Thought Forum (ATF) has conducted a field research on the Israeli policies and practices at the Interior Ministry office in East Jerusalem. The field study discussed the chronic problem of overcrowding and the difficulties faced by the Palestinian citizen at the Office in terms of reasons, purposes and results. This was particularly significant in light of the numerous complaints to ATF's Citizen's Rights Center and other institutions and in light of the several articles and press reports that point to this problem, which has escalated over the years without any serious treatment.

The research was conducted around and inside the Israeli Interior Ministry offices in both the eastern and western parts of Jerusalem.

Draft of the research has been circulated to several Palestinian institutions and individuals involved in Jerusalem issues. This was followed by a special meeting to discuss the research findings. Additional follow up steps on the research occlusions will be carried out later by a committee formed by the participants.

Research's Conclusions:

The obscurity of the Interior Ministry office's policy pertaining to regulations for Palestinian citizens of Jerusalem and regarding the mechanism for organizing the work of the East Jerusalem office allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Successive Israeli governments despite their political approach, have a common policy aimed at achieving the Israeli objective of maintaining a certain percentage of Arabs in Jerusalem.
 2. This policy aims to achieve political goals that serve Israel in case of future negotiations over Jerusalem.
 3. Urging the Palestinian citizen of Jerusalem to resort to the judicial and Israeli legal system as a reference for cases related to citizenship rights.¹⁵ However, Jerusalem is an occupied city like other West Bank cities in which Israeli laws should not be implemented. Applying Israeli laws is a violation to international conventions and laws issued by international references particularly the UN.
 4. There is an apparent shift in the policy of the Interior Ministry towards Palestinian residents after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993. The change was characterized by increased strictness, given that it stopped granting its approval for family reunification requests. It also issued new instructions regarding entry into Jerusalem for men whose wives are from Jerusalem. Moreover, it implemented a new program regarding "the right of residency" through applying the concept of the "center of life" and began a new policy of withdrawing IDs of Jerusalemite women.
 5. The absence of effective Palestinian techniques to confront the Israeli policy, which implies the absence of a clear Palestinian plan to confront Israeli policies. There are also insufficient individual efforts by important figures and individuals.
 6. The change in the way the Interior Ministry deals with the citizenship and nationality of the applicant. All the problems in Interior Ministry office in East Jerusalem such as overcrowding, employees' attitudes and the implemented rules do not exist in the West Jerusalem office which provides services to Israeli citizens although the two offices belong to one ministry. This is proof that these measures fall within the concept of ethnic cleansing, which is based on the concept and policy of racism.
 7. Israel deliberately does not draw the attention of the local and international media to its policy implemented through the Interior Ministry office since the policies depend on actual implementation by verbal denial of the principle of silent expulsion.
 8. All of these policies contradict with human rights and freedoms, particularly the right to housing, residency, travel, health, education, citizenship and other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
 9. The continuation of these horrid conditions whether the overcrowding or mistreatment, indicates to an official approach aimed at humiliating Palestinians.
-

10. The complexity of the measures and the resulting actual threat to citizens' rights, are considered a means of pressuring the citizen and forcing him to search for illegitimate and incorrect means of protecting this basic right.
11. The nature of implemented measures has led to the emergence of a group of parasites that benefit from the suffering and exploit it to achieve personal interests.
12. There is a clear and integral coordination between the various Israeli apparatuses which aim to achieve the main policy according to certain measures conducted by the municipality, interior ministry, department of national insurance and the security apparatuses.
13. There are administrative and technical arrangements by which overcrowding could be lessened or even ended. Not actually taking these measures does not mean that officials do not know them.

Drug Abuse in East Jerusalem

ATF hosted several meetings for NGOs working on drug abuses in East Jerusalem. The meetings served as a tool to assess the need to carry out a field research on drug addiction in the east part of the City.

Publications

Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh⁴

Two issues of *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh*, the quarterly Journal of ATF, has been published in the reporting period. The *Fifth, Sixth and seventh Quarterly Reports on the Democratization Process in Palestine* were part of the major contents.

ATF's Newsletter (Al Multaqa)

Two issues of ATF's Newsletter, *Al-Multaqa* were published during the reporting period. The publication which serves as a news supplement to *Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh* Journal covered ATF activities and news in the previous twelve months. The publication has been widely circulated locally and internationally.

Second General Report on Democratic Formation

The English version of the *General Report on the Democratization Process in Palestine* was published in May 1999. The report covered the period from April 1997 to October 1998, thus including four *Quarterly Reports on the Democratization Process in Palestine*. It included 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

⁴ For a content list of previous issues, see our website.

judicial authorities throughout the eighteen months period. The Arabic version was published in March 1999.

Three special meetings were conducted during the reporting period to discuss the outcome of the report and to contribute with views on the state of democratization in Palestine. In particular, the meetings sought to present the Report with emphasis on the conclusions, to receive feedback from participants on the Report's design, methodology and content and to discuss and assess the democratization process in Palestine.

The first meeting was held on April 7th and attended by 45 senior officials and public figures. The second meeting was held on May 31st and attended by 26 representatives of Civil Society organizations and young leadership. The third meeting took place on June 8th and attended by 21 representatives of foreign countries and international development agencies working in Palestine. On the three occasions, copies of the report were distributed in advance to provide participants with ample time to review the document.

Written and verbal feedback received before and during the meetings indicated readers deep appreciation of the efforts put in the report and pointed out to its objectiveness and high quality. Of particular importance was the shared opinion that the report proved to be one of the best ever written on the democratization process in Palestine. In fact many considered the report as an essential sourcebook on the subject. They pointed out that report was able to outline 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. All were in agreement that ATF must continue with this annual practice.

The Arabic version of the *Second General Report on the Democratic Formation in Palestine* has been sent to the printing firm to be published in April 2000. The report covered the period from November 1998 to December 1999, thus covering 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 fourteen months period. Translation work started on the English version and hopefully it would be published in April too.

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 on March 30th, to discuss the drafted Report. While commending the huge effort and sound approach, several recommendations and observations were made by participating members (2 females and 16 males) on different parts of the report for the attention of the Program team drafting the report.

As with the first Report, special meetings will be conducted to discuss the outcome of the study with senior officials and public figures that will receive the published report in advance, as will as with the general public. The same

approach will be adopted with international bodies working in Palestine following the publishing of the English version.

Reports and Proceedings

Annual Report 1999

For the first time, ATF has published an English version of its 22nd Annual Report. The report included summarized background information on ATF and an illustrated description of its activities under the democracy program during 1998.

Mechanisms of Unifying and Developing the legal System in Palestine October 1999

A special report on the proceedings of the public debate on unification of the legal system in Palestine held in July 1999.

Information Sheets and Monthly Reports

Twelve *Monthly Information Sheets* on the democratic formation in Palestine were compiled and distributed during the reporting period.

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.

An information sheet on the Citizen Rights Center was distributed to participants in all of the public activities.

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 2000, to 743 cases.

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 past 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: lack of adequate health services provided by the public sector, shortages in educational facilities and poor infrastructures particularly in rural areas and refugee Camps.

In a follow up development to ATF's public debate and publication on the International Criminal Court in 1998, a national committee has been finally established to follow up Palestine's participation in the international effort in this field.

Legislation Unit

Five publications on legislation to be presented to citizens in a simplified manner were completed during the reporting period. They included:

- *Local Government Councils and Local Councils Elections laws.*
(Both will be published when a decision is taken by the PNA to hold local elections).
- *Investment Law.*
- *Civil Defense Law.*
- *Correction and Rehabilitation Centers Law*

Resource Center

The process of developing ATF's Resource Center continued throughout the reporting period. 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.

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

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.⁵ Following are some of the major highlights:

On July 14, ATF, representatives met with *Hasan Asfour*, the newly appointed Minister of NGOs. *Mr. Asfour* requested the meeting to discuss ATF's reaction to the establishment of this ministry, how ATF envisions the role of this new ministry, and ways in which both sides can cooperate in order to improve the status of NGOs in Palestine.

ATF later presented the Minister with a proposed action plan, which identified several areas where ATF can implement activities directed towards strengthening the role of civil society organizations and enhancing their coordination with the ministry.

ATF's President has made two presentations, one in Ramallah together with *Dr. Azmi Sha'uaibi*, about the corruption issue and the second in Gaza, together with *Dr. Haydar Abdelshfi*, Minister *Zuhdi Nashashibi* and PLC member *Abdel Karim Abu Salah*, on human rights violations in Jerusalem. Additionally, *Mr. Abu Arafah* attended the Ninth Conference on Corruption held in Durban, South Africa. His participation was sponsored by USAID.

During the recently held meeting for the general assembly of the Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), ATF along with other eight CSOs has been elected to the membership of the Coordinating Committee for its coming two years term. This rewarding step came in recognition of the active role played by ATF in enhancing the role of Palestinian civil society and will entail more efforts on the part of ATF to keep up with its esteemed work.

ATF hosted a meeting between representatives of Palestinian human rights and democracy organizations and *Mr. Geiorgio Giacomelli* Repertoire of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Palestine. The meeting served as a venue to provide the UN officer with an update on the status of human rights in Palestine.

ATF staff members have participated in various symposia and conferences held by different local institutions. Some were involved in local training courses such as management of resource centers, International accounting systems and maintenance of Web sites. The Legislation Officer joined *Br Zeit*

⁵ More details are available in ATF's newsletter.

University to complete her Masters degree in law while along side her work with ATF.

ATF along with other partner NGOs working on Democracy and Governance has participated in several coordination meetings held by USAID. Those meetings discussed sound approaches to avoid duplication, recent developments in civil society issues and to introduce new members of USAID staff.

Najat Amro, Legislation Officer for Citizen Rights Center and *Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah*, ATF President attended *The United Nations International Meeting on Measures to Enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including Jerusalem* on June 14-15 in Cairo. The conference convened in an effort to provide an opportunity for governments, intergovernmental organizations, international experts and NGOs to discuss aspects of the Geneva Convention and its impact on the occupied Palestinian territories and Jerusalem. Plenary sessions examined violations by Israel under the Fourth Geneva Convention, enforcement of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the *Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Measures to Enforce the Convention*, scheduled to meet in Geneva on July 15.

Mr. Ahmad Siam, Field Coordinator, participated in the Salzburg Seminar Session on Free Markets Economies.

Final Remarks

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 setting a practical example on how to handle citizens concerns through adopting participatory and democratic means.

In this regard ATF's initiatives during the Democracy Day Campaign of 1999 drew special attention from the Technical Steering Committee established by the PLC to manage the Campaign. In its final meeting held in April 1999, the Committee adopted the final version of its report on the Campaign, which was drafted by ARD. The report that was presented to the Speaker of the PLC for a special reading in the Council commended ATF for its qualitative contributions.

The above mentioned development on electing ATF for the membership of the PNGO Coordinating Committee could be directly attributed to the recognition ATF has gained throughout the sound implementation of this Program's activities. That was also noted in the response of the Ministry of NGOs to ATF's written comments on the proposed strategic plan of the Ministry.

General Statistical Information

April 1, 1999 – March 31, 2000

| Activity | Date | No. of Participants | | |
|--|------------|---------------------|--------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | Total |
| Special Meeting No.1: General Report on the Democratization Process in Palestine | 7/4/1999 | 40 | 5 | 45 |
| Special Debate: Capital Punishment between Action and Reaction | 27/4/1999 | 17 | 2 | 19 |
| Special Meeting with the Minister of Civil Affairs | 29/4/1999 | 15 | 6 | 21 |
| Special Meeting No.2: General Report on the Democratization Process in Palestine | 31/5/1999 | 21 | 5 | 26 |
| Special Meeting No.3: General Report on the Democratization Process in Palestine | 8/6/1999 | 12 | 9 | 21 |
| Town Hall Meeting- Nablus (3) | 20/7/1999 | 81 | 5 | 86 |
| Public Debate- Mechanisms of Unifying and Developing the Legal System in Palestine | 28/7/1999 | 31 | 3 | 34 |
| Parties Meetings- Civil Society Organizations | 12/8/1999 | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| Special Debate: Tribal Law between Civil and Religious Laws | 18/8/1999 | 54 | 3 | 57 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Toubas | 23/8/1999 | 110 | - | 110 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Genin | 31/8/1999 | 44 | 8 | 52 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Tul Karem | 2/9/1999 | 136 | 5 | 141 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Qalqilia | 7/9/1999 | 102 | 4 | 106 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Salfit | 23/9/1999 | 50 | 1 | 51 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Al Bireh | 25/9/1999 | 48 | 3 | 51 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Ramallah | 7/10/1999 | 32 | 12 | 44 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Dahreyeh | 23/10/1999 | 64 | 3 | 67 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Jericho | 27/10/1999 | 266 | 9 | 275 |
| Public Debate: Legislation on Local Administration | 30/10/1999 | 45 | 8 | 53 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Gaza | 13/11/1999 | 84 | 4 | 88 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Rafah | 16/11/1999 | 98 | 7 | 105 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Bir Zeit | 17/11/1999 | 39 | 3 | 42 |

| | | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Local Councils Meetings: Dir Al Balah | 20/11/1999 | 68 | 1 | 69 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Khan Younis | 22/11/1999 | 158 | 2 | 160 |
| Special Meeting: Al Mawasi | 23/11/1999 | 140 | 3 | 143 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Beit Lahia | 30/11/1999 | 94 | 1 | 95 |
| Workshop: Civil Defense Organ in the West Bank | 6/12/1999 | 46 | 5 | 51 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Dura | 22/1/2000 | 78 | 4 | 81 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Beit Hanon | 9/2/2000 | 83 | 1 | 84 |
| Workshop: Youth Needs | 10/2/2000 | 7 | 15 | 22 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Yatta | 12/2/2000 | 66 | - | 66 |
| Workshop: Violence in Educational and Academic Institutions | 15/2/2000 | 38 | 41 | 79 |
| Special Study Session: The Future of the Economic System in Palestine | 29/2/2000 | 6 | - | 6 |
| Special Meeting: Research Presentation on Interior Ministry | 1/3/2000 | 16 | 1 | 17 |
| Special Workshop: Measurable Indicators of Democracy in Palestine | 8/3/2000 | 12 | 3 | 15 |
| Local Councils Meetings: Al Maghazi | 9/3/2000 | 138 | 4 | 142 |
| Public Debate: Palestinian Elections | 14/3/2000 | 21 | 6 | 27 |
| Parties Meetings- Fateh Movement | 21/3/2000 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| Workshop: Made in Palestine | 25/3/2000 | 56 | 12 | 68 |
| Public Debate: Tourism in Palestine Beyond Bethlehem 2000 Project | 8/4/2000 | 30 | 4 | 34 |
| Total No. of Participants in ATF activities | | 2429 | 206 | 2635 |
| Total No. of Cases Received and followed up by the Citizen Rights Center (1/4/1999 - 31/3/2000): 410 | | | | |

The total No. 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.