



Arab Thought Forum

Annual Report

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Contents

ATF MISSION	3
ATF BACKGROUND	3
ATF MANAGEMENT	4
Programs and Activities	4
Civil Society Participation	4
Town Hall Meetings	5
Public Debates	5
Activist Meetings- Round Table Discussion	8
Developing a Model for Accountable Local Government	9
Laying a Foundation for Investigative reporting	11
Computer Literacy for Blind University Students	12
Conflict Resolution Project	12
Democracy Day	13
Local Elections	13
Impact of the Elections on the Palestinian Political Map	14
Developing Palestinian Election Code of Conduct	16
Establish commitment to the Code of Conduct	17
The Code of Conduct a tool for monitoring the election	19
Encourage participation in the Palestinian Elections	20
Democratic Formation in Palestine	21
Development Affairs Journal "Shuun Tanmawiyyeh"	21
Publications and Research	22
Resource Center and Library	22

The ATF Website	22
Public Relations	23
Coordination and Networking	24
Future Prospects	25
List of Tables	26

BACKGROUND

The Arab Thought Forum (ATF), also recognized under the Arabic name Al Multaqa, was established in Jerusalem in 1977 as an independent Palestinian institution. It is a democratic, open forum for Palestinian decision makers, public opinion leaders and citizens at large, and has no affiliation to any government, political party or organization. The strength of the Arab Thought Forum lies in its political independence, which allows it to freely engage in a broad range of subjects related to the Palestinian cause. As one of the leading Palestinian organizations specializing in socio-economic development, ATF has served for two decades as an important platform for the presentation of development strategies of Palestinian nation building. Initially focused on scientific studies and research, ATF has expanded to actively identify critical issues for analysis, and public debate, and has selectively initiated important pilot and long term projects in order to influence and contribute to the development of the Palestinian people.

Under its founding mandate, the ATF has succeeded to play a major role in influencing and shaping the thinking of policy makers. The ATF has opened and maintained strong lines of communication with the Palestinian National Authority and Palestinian intellectuals, as well as citizens in all geographical locations throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Through these relationships, the ATF has been able to contribute to debates on the new Palestinian Authority Constitution and draft laws, and has demonstrated the capability to quickly respond to the challenges of critical issues requiring public discussion, assessment and well-considered policy recommendations. Following the signing of the Oslo Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Israeli Government in 1993, the Palestinians were placed at the threshold of realizing their struggle for freedom, independence and prosperity. Recognizing the importance of sound economic and democratic formation and development, the ATF began in 1994 to work on redefining its strategies and philosophy to correspond with these changes in Palestinian society.

ATF MISSION

Palestinian civil society is a fundamental requirement of statehood, and that Palestinian people need to play their role as active participants in the democratic process and state building ATF is committed to the belief that state structures must be developed to serve and be responsive to an active and critical public, which is conscious of its obligations and duties, as well as its rights and entitlements.

MANAGEMENT

ATF is committed to democracy and a democratic society. For ATF, democracy begins at home. It possesses built-in democratic structures at all levels of the organization. The policy guidelines of the organizations are set by the Board of Trustees, which is composed of 25 to 40 intellectuals. The Board of Trustees consists of the chairman, deputy chairman, and reporter. A Monitoring Committee is formed from the Board of Trustees to follow-up on the administrative and financial affairs of the organization.

The Board of Trustees elects the Board of Directors, which consists of seven members serving in the following posts: head, two deputies, secretary, treasurer and members without portfolio. The Board of Trustees elects all posts for a two-year period.

The ATF director supervises the overall activities of the organization. There are 15 full time staff employed by the ATF, in addition to several consultants, volunteers and trainees. The ATF maintains and operates two offices, one in Jerusalem and a second in Ar-Ram, south of

Ramallah. The locations of these two offices, which also serve as centers for ATF work, meetings and activities, are strategically important especially at this time of irregular travel disruptions and restrictions.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Several systems are used to monitor and evaluate the activities of the ATF. In addition to a Monitoring Committee, a separate computerized evaluation system tracks and analyzes all activities and indicators, and measures their performance and impact. The ATF also maintains a computerized accounting and financial reporting system, in addition to a baseline data system to assist in carrying out regular periodic reporting.

Over the last 29 years, the ATF has maintained a disciplined tradition of conducting annual meetings for the Board of Trustees, monthly meetings of the Executive Committee and weekly staff meetings, in addition to special meetings for ad hoc committees and identified task and interest areas. Finally, all funded activities are monitored jointly with the respective donor organization, through both periodic reporting and evaluation sessions.

Financial Management and Accountability

ATF possesses the experience and management skills to financially administer its projects. ATF's computerized accounting system produces the required financial reports. In addition, ATF accounts are audited annually by Ernst and Young International.

Programs and Activities

A major thrust of the Arab Thought Forum activities during the year 2005 was directed towards its implementation of 14 projects including:

Civil Society Participation

This program aims to enhance and develop democratic awareness and practice in Palestinian society by providing forums for dialogue and discussion between and among citizens and decision-makers from all levels of society. To meet this objective, the Arab Thought Forum promotes and facilitates three different styles of meeting formats, incorporating participation of the general public, intellectuals, local and national government officials and leaders of civil society organizations and institutions. The three styles include:

Town Hall Meetings

The Town Hall Meetings are designed for a broad sector of Palestinian society and offers an open platform for citizens to express their concerns in a constructive and frank dialogue with their representative officials. The Town Hall Meeting includes a system of reporting and follow-up to assure that the issues of concern discussed at the meeting are further addressed by the relevant parties. During the year, 7 town hall meetings were held with the attendance of 581 citizens, of which 36 were women.

The Town Hall Meetings conducted by the Arab Thought Forum in the year 2005 continued to be characterized by their broad geographic range, reaching population groups throughout the West Bank and Gaza strip regardless of size. Reflective of the importance that the Arab Thought Forum places on including citizens in remote and marginalized areas,

Twenty-one male and female speakers including government officials, politicians, prominent figures and local council heads took part in these meetings.

Meetings focused on the following issues:

- The Israeli violations and offenses
- Insufficient prioritization of Palestinian youth needs
- The need for increasing social solidarity among citizens
- Internal security
- The election process
- Illegal occupation of public and government property
- Municipal services
- Unemployment in Palestinian society
- The Separation Wall and its economic and social impact on citizens' way of life
- Local issues and concerns specific to each community

Participating government officials had the opportunity to reply directly and address these concerns, including clarifying whether the issue fell under the jurisdiction of the local council or other official institution.

Public Debates

Public Debates provide a platform to address and discuss issues of special importance to Palestinian civil society. Presenters include officials and leaders from governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutions and concerned individuals who are involved in the focus topic of the meeting. These debates are designed to attract an active audience who are encouraged to raise questions, present their thoughts and contribute to developing recommendations.

Public Debates focus on special issues of concern to Palestinian society and call on relevant experts as well as responsible officials to present and discuss their views, provide information and respond to questions before public audiences. Recommendations emanating from the discussions at the Public Debates are disseminated to concerned parties. In addition, as part of the follow-up, issues of the Public Debates often become subjects for further research by the Arab Thought Forum.

Following is a summary of the Public Debates conducted in the year 2005:

In 2005, the Arab Thought Forum organized 3 public debates to address the most concerning social issues. A total of 112 citizens, including 26 women, turned out for these sessions which include:

Information Technology in Palestine:

Date: 23 February 2005

Experiences and the future outlook of IT services in Palestine on the light of the increased demand on this service.

Speakers: Azam Alahmad, Ministry of Telecommunications. Abdel Malek Al Jaber, Telecommunication Company. Abdel Raheem Taha, Legislative Council researcher.

Teacher and Civil Service Law:

Date: 25 April 2005

Speakers: Reyad Alza'noon, Legislative Council. Sa'di Alkrunz, Legislative Council. Mahmoud Almagni, Teachers Union.

Violence in the Palestinian society

Date: 16 May 2005

Discuss the phenomena of the increasing level of violence in the Palestinian society, its reasons, impact and means to contain it.

Speakers: Ahmad Igbarya, Ministry of Education - Mustafa Ala'boush, Mufti of Jenin
Mohammad Ayash, Chief of Police

Activist Meetings- Round Table Discussion

The Activist Meetings encourage pluralism in the Palestinian political system. For the past nine years, the Arab Thought Forum has brought key leaders of Palestinian political parties to participate in a round table discussion moderated by the Arab Thought Forum Director, Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah. Activist Meetings or the Round Table Discussions invite participants with specific interest and/or experience in a prioritized topic and facilitates in-depth discussions, the sharing of ideas and information, and the development of pertinent recommendations. As a result of these meetings, position papers are developed and published in the ATF journal to reach a wider audience.

Each Activist Meeting is dedicated to a current issue of concern about which the participants express their respective points of view and experience, and then contribute to a group discussion on the topic. Position papers that are formulated as a result of these meetings are often published in the Arab Thought Forum journal for dissemination to a wider audience. 38 people participated, including 11 women.

Following are the political issues that were addressed:

Plurality within the political system in Palestine

Date: 26 February 2005

The meeting discussed the opportunities for and obstacles to the implementation of a multi-party Palestinian political system.

Participants: Abdel Lateef Gaith, Qais Abdel Kareem, Hassan Yousef, Wasel Abu Yousef, Ali Abu Hilal, Ahmad Ghname and Qadora Faris.

Impact of the election on democracy in Palestine

Date: 14 March 2005

The meeting discusses the relation and influence of election on developing the Palestinian democracy

Participants: Hamdi Shakoura, Majdi Abu Zaid and Muhsen Abu Ramadan.

Developing a Model for Accountable and Transparent Local Government

During the local government reform and elections, this project aims to develop assessment tools to measure the level of commitment, integrity, and transparency on the part of Palestinian local governing bodies with the goal of producing generally-accepted benchmarks and performance-measurement scales to assist local government perform based on acceptable level of good governance. The project were lunch in the beginning of 2004 and completed on July 2005 with the objective of developing a model to evaluate, monitor and report accountability and transparency in local government with the aim to protect the integrity of these institutions and secure the confidence of the public.

The project aims to develop a form of measurement to assess the performance of the Palestinian local councils in an attempt to assess the level of commitment, integrity and transparency in the performance of these bodies; the project is expected to develop generally accepted scales to measure the performance and to hold a general conference in the middle of the year 2005 to propose the recommendations which fit to develop and improve performance.

The most important outcomes of the project in 2005 include:

Six meetings: with citizens during February in the targeted municipalities to obtain their feed back on the Integrity Index

Workshop: to discuss the draft of the Integrity Index developed by targeted councils with the participation of 76 citizens including 9 women

Date: 28 march 2005, Ramallah

Speakers: Khalid Alqwasm, Ministry of Local Government. Burhan Jarar, PLC member. Marouf Zahran, Local Government Union

Conference: To adopt the Integrity Index and developing relative recommendations on the transparency in local government.

Date: 16 June 2005, Ramallah

With the participation of 98 citizens including 12 women.

Khalid Al Qwasm, Ministr of Local Government. Burhan Jarar, PLC member. Marouf Zahran, Local Government Union. Ahmad Gnim, Deputy of Local Government and Omar Samha, Local Government advisor.

1. Importance of developing integrity index and make it available for implementation
2. Activate the role of the ministry of local government in monitoring, follow up and training of local government councils
3. Amend the local government law to respond bore to the needs of the local councils
4. Fairness in allocating resources
5. The importance of regional planning
6. Importance of citizens participation
7. Importance of training and town management
8. The necessity of reforming the Palestinian Council for Jerusalem as a capital of Palestine

Joint committee formed from the ministry and ATF has been assigned to further develop means to implement the integrity index.

Investigative reporting in the Palestinian Printed Press

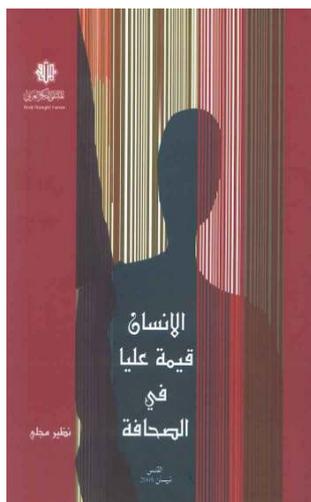
Given the important role of the press in the reform process and democratic development, this project intend to work with the Palestinian media sector, in particular the printed press, through a cooperation with umbrella institutions both official and from the civil society. The project targeted journalists and editors working in the printed Palestinian press. The project developed standards and guidelines for professional journalism, both legal and technical, necessary to convert the printed press to a real 'fourth estate' that could impact comprehensive rule, reform and democratic development in Palestine, with a particular emphasis on investigative reporting. Additionally the project designed to increase awareness of the press' role in state building and the promotion of democracy, the project also lays the foundation for advocacy and draft legislation for a press law to support the journalist's freedom to exercise their investigation and delivery of news and information to the public.

The project depend on utilizing the experience of local, Arab and international experts in order to increase the knowledge and perceptions of the target groups and to establish necessary protection for press freedom and to increase the ability and develop skills of Palestinian journalists to write and publish investigative reports. A Palestinian Journalistic Manual was developed on the clarifying the criteria and principles for the investigative reporting based on international standards. The project also provided training to number of Palestinian journalists on how to write reports according to the criteria and principles covered in the manual. Emphasis was given to address the requirement for influential reporting. Recommendations has been formulated in regard to main factors affecting protected and efficient journalists including laying the foundation for a draft bill to guarantee the rights of journalists and define their duties. 112 journalist and officials directly participated in the project including 24 women. The Project objectives include:

Increase the capacity of the Palestinian press to provide the public with investigative reporting that can contribute to reform and democratic development in Palestine. The project outcomes include:

- A study analyzing the technical and legal factors. The study involves drafting proper legislation, influencing the capacity of investigative journalism in the Palestinian press, and identifying the areas requiring attention for follow-up is published and disseminated.
- Standards and guidelines for investigative reporting according to internationally accepted principles in democratic societies are developed, disseminated and discussed by concerned parties through forum meetings, to the working press journalists at the target newspapers and the news agency.
- Pilot professional development program for Palestinian print journalists and editors at target newspapers and agencies is facilitated, and includes the issuance of a manual to serve as a training tool.
- Awareness of issues and concerns regarding investigative reporting in the Palestinian press is raised among representative from relevant organizations involved with journalism, the general public and decision-makers through proper forums.
- Issues and recommendations emanating from the study, forum meetings, professional development program and working group are communicated to decision-makers, including legislators.

In general, the project targets Palestinian journalists (correspondents and editors) who specialized in written mass media, including: the three daily newspaper – *Al Quds*, *AlAyyam* and *Al Hayat Al Jadida* – the Palestine News Agency Wafa, other Palestinian institutions, and civil society institutions. The 18 month project were launched in January 2004 and completed in July 2005.



The 2004 ATF annual report covers main activities conducted in that year while the current report covers main outcomes of the project in 2005 including:

6 Working Group meetings conducted with participants from governmental, legislative, judiciary and security representatives to clarify relations of each entity to the issue of investigative reporting and the influence that such reports could play in the reform and development. As a result, ten reports prepared by the trainees has been published at local newspapers

Final workshop has been conducted to evaluate the issue, several recommendations were adopted including:

- The need for a clear and modern law, based on the proposed amendment developed by this initiative
- Develop plan of action by the ministry of information to clearly regulate the media work and the establishing of the higher information council.

- Call the media and press institutions to support the issue of investigative reporting including providing the necessary protection and economic and legal means to enable the journalists preparing effective reports.
- Call journalists for brave initiatives and increase their awareness on the responsibilities and duties based on international standards.
- Call the Journalists Association to perform its duties in democratically representing all journalists and providing the means to encourage all journalists to become active member of the association.
- Call the academic institutions to create rational mix between academic and applied work to guarantee more affective studies.

Computer Literacy for Blind University Students

In cooperation with the Welfare Association, the Italian organization "*Recercia e Cooperazione*", and Al Quds Open University, this project aims to establish two specialized computer centers for blind university students in Palestine, providing services previously unavailable in the West Bank. This expansion of services to blind students will enable them to expand their career prospects, benefit from computer and technological advancements, and more fully develop their potential. Initially, twenty visually impaired persons will take part in training at the centers in Jenin and Hebron. It is hoped that the centers will be enlarged and expanded over time in order to serve a greater number of clients.

The project was launched in mid 2004 and completed in July 2005, the current report covers accomplishment during 2005.

This project is considered an advanced practical step for the Arab Thought Forum in serving those with special needs, following several initiatives within a theoretical framework which the ATF had already undertaken in their interest.

ATF was awarded an insignia from Al Quds Open University in appreciation for its endeavors in this regard.

The ATF through a number of its projects has been involved directly and indirectly with issues related to the disabled and people with special needs. However, the most significant factor that led to researching and developing this particular project was the input of several participants in the ATF Youth Leadership Program (university level) who articulated the challenges of their disabilities – especially related to being university students. The absence of computer use by blind and visually impaired students was identified as a pivotal separation between them and sighted students which had far reaching consequences in their academic performance and job opportunities post graduation.

To further explore this issue, ATF turned to its extensive contacts in the fields of higher education, training, employment and disabilities, including the Ministry of Higher Education, The Palestinian Union for the Disabled, The Palestinian Central Committee for the Disabled, educators in the university as well as a number of blind professionals living and working in Palestine.

The ATF conducted a survey to assess the actual needs of blind students and learned about available resources that had been created to accommodate the use of computers by people without sight. The conclusion was that this problem had viable solutions. The technology and

apparatus for blind students to become computer literate exist. However, due to a number of factors including a lack of general awareness of available options, the expense and difficulty of obtaining the equipment and software, and the need for specialized trainers in their use, none of the universities in the West Bank, to date, has provided this aid to its blind and visually impaired students.

While all other students are required to achieve proficiency in the use of computers, and are called upon to incorporate certain information in their studies directly provided by computer access, these requirements are waived for blind and visually impaired students. The result is that students who are blind and visually impaired are excluded from the full benefit of their university education and furthermore placed at an additional competitive disadvantage of sighted graduates when they apply for employment.

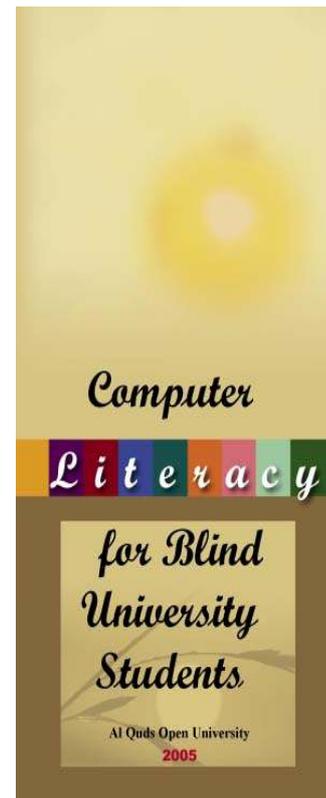
ATF contacts with the many relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutions, and concerned individuals during the development of the idea of the project proposal, generated unanimous enthusiasm and support for this initiative. These already established relationships will be a valuable resource during the implementation of the project.

The project produced results includes:

- Two trainers specialized in enabling the visually impaired to achieve computer literacy with adapted equipment and software, and two information technology specialists able to provide the maintenance support for the systems provided by the specialized computer centers.
- Two specially equipped computer centers established within the North and South Districts of the West Bank, providing computer literacy training for blind students and enabling accessibility to computer technology for the blind user.
- Two groups of blind students enrolled in the associate partner universities. Both groups receive training and supervision on the use of this computer equipment and software.
- Information workshop with equipment/software demonstrations are conducted to introduce the governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions, educators and school officials, and individuals with visual impairment regarding the availability of advanced computer technology to enable blind users and the advantages that these types of resources will have for the individual beneficiary and society in general.

Accomplishment during 2005 includes:

1. Purchasing the required equipments
2. Operating the two centers in Hebron and Jenin
3. Train and appoint the trainers
4. Conduct the final workshop(July 18 2005) in which overall evaluation conducted to assess accomplishments and further needs



Historical Narrative Project

The Arab Thought Forum's participation in this project is in response to an offer from an institution in Salzburg, Austria to collaborate with its special conflict resolution project, which aims to contribute to finding solutions to international conflicts. The project is a form of dialogue about history, and it takes place between two working groups – Palestinian and Israeli – each composed of 10 to 15 intellectuals. The initiative is playing a pioneering role in having an objective, academic and historical dialogue on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and is not a repetition or imitation of previous initiatives. The first preliminary session between the two groups was held in Salzburg in order to agree on the general principles and guidelines of action; the Palestinian side included the following: Adel Yahia, Salim Tamari, Adel Manna, Hilga Bomfarten, Albert Agazriyan, Nazmi Gu'ba, Jad Issaq, Abbas Abed Haq, Azzam Abu Soud, Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah and Maha Taweel. Haidar Abed Shafi and Salah Saqa were unable to attend due to conditions of Gaza Strip. ATF will be ready for any collaboration with Palestinian specialized parties and it will supervise, coordinate, and organize any activities in this regard.

The issue concerns an offer from an institution located in Salzburg, Austria to collaborate with the ATF in its special project to conflict resolution which aims to contribute in finding solutions to conflicts at the world level. The project is some form of dialogue which is based on the historical dimension and it takes place between two work groups, 12 Palestinian intellectuals and 12 Israeli. The proposed project suggests playing a pioneering role in having an objective, academic and historical dialogue on the Palestinian Israeli conflict. The initiative will not be a

repetition or imitation of other initiatives. The first preliminary session between the two groups was held in Salzburg in order to agree on the general principles and guidelines of action; the Palestinian side included the following: Adel Yahia, Salim Tamari, Adel Manna, Hilga Bomfarten, Albert Agaziryan, Nazmi Gu'ba, Jad Issaq, Abbas Abed Haq, Azzam Abu Soud, Abdel Rahman Abu Arafeh and Maha Taweel. Haider Abdul Shafi and Salah Saqa were unable to attend due to the conditions of the Gaza Strip.

Several coordinating meetings took place in which agreements on developing 70 maps concerning 1948 war including main events during, before and after the war. On a special working meeting took place in Germany by invitation from George Eckert Foundation during December 2005 plan of work has been developed.

The Democracy Day

The democracy day on March 7 provides another opportunity to influence the democratic process, although ATF repeatedly participated in this event in previous years, this year had more meaning with the deferred elections taking place. It should be mentioned that the ATF has been assigned by the PLC in 1999 to organize the first ever celebration on this occasion. This year 11 meetings organized by ATF covering; Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, Qalqelia, Jenin, Tulkaem, Salfet and Tubas. 878 citizens participated including 104 women in addition to 18 ministers and PLC members

Local Elections

Because of the important role played by Palestinian local councils and the impact of their decisions on the everyday lives of citizens, in 2005, ATF continued to focus its attention on activating these councils and provided an open forum for citizens to discuss with local officials issues of import and concern to them. The objective is to improve the councils' functioning, performance, and responsiveness to citizen needs. In response to repeated calls for free and democratic local government elections, ATF expanded its focus to include elections-related issues. From April 5-20, 2005, ATF organized 24 town hall meetings in seven localities where elections would be held. The meetings were at the following locations:

Hebron District – 4 meetings in Yatta, Doura, Bani Nuiem and Edna

Beit Lehem District – 2 meetings in Biet Sahour and Beitlehem

Jerusalem District – 6 meetings in Al Ram and Anata

Salfet District – 1 meeting

Qalqelia District- 1 meeting

Tulkarem District- 2 meetings in Ateel and Anabta

During the fourth stage ATF conducted 8 additional meetings between December 1-13, 2005. 2 meetings has been conducted in each; Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah and Al Bireh. 409 citizens participated in the meetings including 30 women. Representatives of 16 lists were among the participating candidates.

The objective of these meetings was to open the floor for discussion between citizens and candidates in order to give each candidate an equal opportunity to meet the local electorate and discuss the issues. In this way, all candidates, without discrimination or impartiality, were offered a chance to present their programs and plans for the local council should they win in the elections. Additionally, citizens were afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions and discuss their views of potential programs. Such open discussions have the added benefit of

providing a basis for holding elected officials accountable in the future to do what they have promised.

Finally, the majority of meetings took place in a democratic atmosphere, which is indicative of a democratic transformation in the Palestinian people.

Impact of the Legislative Elections on the Palestinian Political Map Political

The Palestinian Legislative Council passed a long-delayed election law paving the way for legislative elections that had indefinitely postponed, for the time being, no new legislative election date was announced, the Central Elections Commission (CEC) has recently declared that it would need three months from the date of the approval of the law to make preparations for holding the parliamentary elections. During this period, complementary registration of voters, nomination for candidatures and election campaigning will be held. The coming elections would be the first parliamentary polls in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1996.

The new law would create a mixed electoral system with half the lawmakers chosen by local districts, and the other half chosen from a national list of party candidates, replacing the current legislative voting process, whereby each electoral district votes for a separate list of candidates, with a national list process whereby all districts vote either for or against a single, nation-wide list of candidates for each party. Lawmakers voted on increasing the number of council seats from the current 88 to 132.

With the PLC adopting a national list approach to legislative elections, a group must secure the vote of 5 percent of the total electorate at least to qualify for seats. The percentage requirement would not pose a problem for *Fateh* or *Hamas*; however, it would be an obstacle for the shrinking leftist groups and the emerging independent parties. Groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and independent parties like the new Palestinian Initiative would have to join forces and run as one party or a coalition under the national list approach to increase their chance.

The proposed changes would thus narrow the political landscape into two dominant camps: *Fateh* and *Hamas*. A third, broadly pluralist coalition might take shape but competition with the established political and resistance movements would prove difficult to surmount. The results of the PLC elections may give way to a new Palestinian political landscape and trigger a significant reconstruction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The results of the recent municipal elections, in which the two dominant parties emerged as the major players, further indicate that the upcoming PLC elections will be a two-party race.

There is indeed a problem with Palestinian politics today. However, the core of the problem concerns the identity of the two principal Palestinian organizations, not a conflict between young reformers and old diehards. And it is best dealt with by bringing more forces into the political mainstream, not by excluding them.

The current Palestinian political attitudes provide some indicators; the May 2005 poll found that 75 percent of the surveyed persons would participate in the PLC elections. Although the poll found that the majority still trusts Abbas and is satisfied with his performance, support for *Fateh* dropped from 42 percent in December 2004 to 36 percent in May 2005. Meanwhile, public support for *Hamas* remained consistent at 20 percent between December 2004 and May 2005.

If the PLC elections are held on shortly, *Fateh* has little time to solidify its approval rating with the Palestinian public and to keep its place at the helm of the PA and the PLO. For *Hamas*, the elections could be the first step in a drastic makeover of the Palestinian political landscape.

To conclude, the Palestinian political map is shifting unless there is a serious effort in to change a nation-building process that will empower moderates, the move toward the Islamization of Palestinian politics would be a matter of time.

The parliamentary elections will not only be a direct competition between two dominant parties. Many Palestinians will vote on the basis of family and clan, with political programs having only tangential influence. Where the two organizations will face off, it will in many instances be a filtered, indirect rivalry. Because they worry about how they may be perceived (*Hamas* as too extremist, *Fatah* as overly complacent and opportunist), both will seek to recruit independent, respectable candidates or make alliances with them. Still is worth mentioning that the Palestinian resistance movement *Jihad* announced that it will boycott the Palestinian legislative elections no matter when the ballot is held.

The project objective is to encourage a more active participation of the Palestinian citizens on the legislative election and increase public awareness and confidence on the impact of the election process by facilitating active discussions among high level political and public opinion leaders.

The specific objectives of the proposed project include:

- Provide the Palestinian opinion and community leaders with forum for critical debates and analysis of the impact of the new election law on the future political map in Palestine
- Stimulating citizen participation, awareness and interest
- Provide views and expected impacts of the election on the Palestinian political future of concerned citizens.

Developing Palestinian Election Code of Conduct

The 25th January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections are considered an important milestone in the Palestinian march towards democracy, building state institutions and establishing political system. The fact that these elections emerged from drastic political changes on the ground would contribute in making this process as a base towards the establishment of the Palestinian political system and state. The strategy for this initiative focuses on this arena, with the aim to increase citizen participation and to develop better environment for the election process. The election process will be of particular importance, not only as a necessary constitutional step, but rather as a major factor towards shaping the future of the Palestinian political system.

In order to provide the suitable environment for such an important process, careful preparation and implementation have to take place before, during and after the elections, such environment would have a determining factor on the future, especially how the democratic practices would be undertaken and performed.

In contrary to the 1996 election which was manipulated by one major party, the coming election expected to involve active participation from all political spectrums; on the light of week election culture, humble election practices and polarized society, negative implication could take place affecting not only the election process but further impacting the future with wrong norms and feelings. Accordingly, effort have to be made in order to assure election that is accepted by the

citizens and all political parties and by election that takes place without violence, coercion or intimidation.

The accumulated experiences in democratic societies led to the development of election Code of Conduct for Political Parties, the purpose of this Code of Conduct is to enable political parties, candidates and their representatives to conduct election campaign based on ideals and standards of democratic principles and inspiration drawn from the morals and precepts of the society traditions. Accordingly, and on the lack of such code in Palestine, this proposed project intend to develop a Palestinian Code of Conducts based on participatory approach by involving the political parties and other concerned groups in the process.

Although this proposed project is not intended to be a training program, it does incorporate important elements of indirect training and education aiming at encouraging more active involvement and commitment of Palestinian political parties to the needs of ensuring a free, fair and just election and to increase public confidence through facilitating active discussions among representatives of the Palestinians political parties, civil society organizations and other concerned groups.

This initiative will be an addition to the strategy of previous and current, proposed projects focusing on this election issue, with the aim of developing the capacity of the Palestinian institutions and increasing citizen participation which will help on integrity of this election in order to secure public confidence and gradually develop a culture of democracy and election.

Developing an election Code of Conducts for the Palestinian Political party's candidates and their representatives to assist them conducting an election campaign based on ideals and standards of democratic principles and inspiration drawn from the morals and precepts of the society traditions. An election that associated with a peaceful orderly manner, focusing attention on public issues and avoiding personal recrimination and abuse by firmly maintain discipline to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law.

The steps of the imitative include:

- Organizing 13 meetings with the political parties intend to run for the coming election.
- Forming a working group from representatives of the political parties and the Central Election Commission.
- Developing a draft for Palestinian Code of Conducts for Political parties.
- Organizing one day conference to finalize and adopt the code.
- Issue and widely disseminate the Palestinian Code of Conducts.

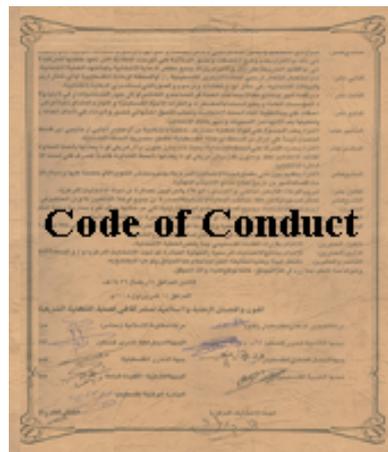
It's the intention of the Arab Thought Forum to further utilize this development and use the COD as a tool for monitoring the election based on the principles adopted by the running parties and groups.

Mr. Anton Penton the Legal Director for South Africa Central Election Commission spend one week in Palestine to share the experience of South Africa in developing its cod of conduct. Tow public meetings will be conducted in Ramallah and Gaza for this regard.

Working group representing the 13 political parties has been formed and concluded the code. On October 17, 2005 the formal signing on the Code of Conduct toke place in Ramallah. With the emerging of new lists, special arrangement has been set to allow for them to sign. All political

parties run for the elections adopted and adhered to the code including Hamas which add its signature on January 4th 2006. Many independent candidates also are among the signatories, most individual candidates signed the code as well.

National follow up committee representing all parties has been set. The Arab Thought Forum has been selected as the General Coordinator of the Committee. Counterpart committee with similar structure has been also formed in Gaza, additional 16 local committees has been also formed and start work in each district. The district committees conducted 15 meetings for all candidates and campaign managers in their areas, including independents. In total, the district and national committees include more than 270 political party representatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in addition to 90 observers appointed by the Arab Thought Forum.



Establish commitment-building mechanism to follow up the Code of Conduct

The project objective aimed at forming national, local committees and sub committees to follow up and build commitment to assure abidance to the Code of Conduct during the election campaigning period and the Election Day. This mechanism is necessary to enable political parties, candidates and their representatives to conduct election campaign based on ideals and standards of democratic principles. An election that associated with a peaceful orderly manner, focusing attention on public issues and avoiding personal recrimination and abuse by firmly maintain discipline to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law.

Achieved results include:

- Forming a national committee from representatives of the political parties, the Central Election Commission, the local mentoring committee and others.
- Weekly meetings with parties as a mean for public outreach strategy to raise the awareness of the society about Code of Conduct and to obtain wide public support based on gathered information from the field.
- Forming 16 local committees from representatives of the political parties, the Central Election Commission, the local mentoring committee and others.
- Forming number of sub committees from representatives of the political parties, the Central Election Commission, the local mentoring committee and others.

- Organizing one day round table meeting to finalize and adopt the procedure for the work of these committees.
- Organizing the required meetings in cooperation with the political parties and the Central Election Commission to facilitate smooth election campaign abide to the agreed upon code.
- Regular press conferences/releases to publicize code violations, geographic concentration of violations, and party response.

By signing code of conduct, the Palestinian political parties have agreed on specific principles and rules that guide them before, during and after elections. The Code of Conduct will enable political parties, candidates and their representatives to conduct election campaign based on ideals and standards and avoiding personal recrimination and abuse by firmly maintain discipline to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law.

The political parties agree in this Code to abide by the provisions of the Palestinian Election Law and the decisions of the CEC. They also agree to avoid slander and refrain from doing or saying anything that would personally harm other candidates or parties. The code also prevents campaigning in mosques, churches and government offices or use of foreign donations. It also limits the amount of money candidates or parties can spend on their campaigns. Most important, it bans carrying or use of weapons during elections, which means end to all public appearances of weapons.

The project activities essentially are to contribute to:

- Ensure that a) the candidates are of integrity, and will take special care to exclude persons who have committed or condoned unlawful acts). b) Respect the rights of all contesting parties and groups and refrain from any action that may hinder them from campaigning freely in accordance with election law. c) Maintain discipline among their members and supporters to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law.
- Ensure that a) the election campaign conducted in a peaceful orderly manner. b) Compliance with the election laws on all matters relating to display of posters and banners, conduct of meetings and processions. c) Co-operation between the police and election staff to deal with all election-related incidents of violence and other breaches of the law.

Beneficiaries

The project implemented with the cooperation of political groups anticipated to participate in addition to Central Election Commission. The project targeted political groups each dedicated for:

- 1) Finalizing and adopting the procedure for the work of committees.
- 2) Cooperate with the political parties and the Central Election Commission to facilitate smooth election campaign abide to the agreed upon code.
- 3) Conduct regular press conferences/releases to publicize code violations, geographic concentration of violations, and party response.

The target groups include about 250 political parties' representatives, public officials, community leaders, CSO repetitive, local government officials, and PLC members not mentioning the entire community who benefited from the project impact.

Project period: November 15, 2005 to February 15, 2006

The Code of Conduct a tool for monitoring the election

As complementary effort ATF conduct additional initiative with the Objective of developing the capacity of the Palestinian institutions to help in the integrity of election in order to secure public confidence and gradually develop a culture of democracy and election and avoiding personal recrimination and abuse by firmly maintaining discipline to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law through setting up monitoring structures necessary for a thorough observation effort by integrating the code of conduct into domestic monitoring efforts.

The net work will essentially monitor the election using the agreed upon principles of the code of conduct as primary monitoring tool, the network will coordinate its work with the follow up committee to be formed from those parties ,

The specific objectives of the imitative include:

- Establish monitoring network
- Train monitors
- Draft observation forms
- Devise reporting and tracking system
- Set up monitoring hotline
- Issue and widely disseminate report on the compliance with the Code of Conducts.

Results:

- Monitoring network formed from representatives from the civil society, the Central Election Commission and others.
- Weekly meetings conducting to evaluate the situation based on information gathered from the field.
- One day workshop organized to finalize and adopt the procedure for the work of this network and explain the monitoring procedures based on the principles of the code.
- Monitors trained, observation forms drafted, reporting and tracking system devised.
- Monitoring hotline Set up, the meetings in cooperation with the political parties and the Central Election Commission organized to facilitate smooth election campaign abide to the agreed upon code.
- Three press conference Conducted to publicize findings and violations.

- Report on the election process and on the compliance with the Code of Conducts issued and widely disseminate the.

Beneficiaries

The project implemented with the cooperation of groups anticipated to participate in addition to Central Election Commission, the Civil Society Monitoring Committee and international institutions. The cooperation will include; coordination activities, design plans and required formats, training method and drafting final report.

The project targeted groups each dedicated for:

- 1) Finalizing and adopting the procedure for the monitoring work.
- 2) Cooperate with the parties and the Central Election Commission to facilitate smooth election campaign abide to the agreed upon code.
- 3) Conduct regular press conferences/releases to publicize code violations, geographic concentration of violations, and party response.

The target groups include about 200 political parties representatives, public officials, community leaders, CSO representatives, local government officials, and PLC members. The total number of total targeted group could reach the entire community who will be benefiting from the project impact.

The ATF hopes that the proposed activities will essentially contribute to:

- Ensure that a) the candidates are of integrity, and will take special care to exclude persons who have committed or condoned unlawful acts). b) Respect the rights of all contesting parties and groups and refrain from any action that may hinder them from campaigning freely in accordance with election law. c) Maintain discipline among their members and supporters to prevent violence, intimidation and breaches of election law.
- Ensure that a) the election campaign conducted in a peaceful orderly manner. b) Compliance with the election laws on all matters relating to display of posters and banners, conduct of meetings and processions. c) Co-operation between the police and election staff to deal with all election-related incidents of violence and other breaches of the law.

Project period: November 15, 2005 to February 15, 2006

Encourage active participation in the Palestinian Legislative Election

This initiative is an addition to the strategy of previous projects focusing on this issue, with the aim of developing citizen participation and involvement on issues of their concern, which will help to secure public confidence. This early and timely intervention will widen the road for a more secure process, and will encourage officials and candidates to operate more efficiently. Furthermore, because this initiative parallels the direct elections, it will help build citizens' confidence that their participation can lead to reform, a multi-party system, and trustworthy public institutions.

The project purpose is to increase citizen's participation and involvement on issues which will help to secure public confidence on the election process and at the same time encourage officials and candidates to operate more efficiently. Furthermore, because this initiative parallels the direct elections, it will help build citizens' confidence that their participation can lead to reform, a multi-party system, and trustworthy public institutions.

The project activities carried out in two stages:

Stage one: It is an early stage that will focus on civic education aiming at encourage different sectors of society to actively participate and positively influence the election, the activities of this stage will include organizing 11 town hall meetings covering the 11 districts of the West Bank and involving around 1000 citizens. The meetings include;

1. Discussions with the community about importance of their active participation on the election and to provide them with information related to their basic rights.
2. Educational presentation to the community to remedy the current lack of broad-based understanding of the key elements of free and fair elections.

Stage two: It is a late stage that will be carried out during the election official campaigning period that will focus on the interaction between legislative candidates and constituents aiming at sharing views between both to promote democratic participation and increase integrity of these elections, the activities of this stage will also include organizing 11 town hall meetings covering the 11 districts of the West Bank and involving around 1000 citizens but with the participation of candidates.

The objective of these meetings was to open the floor for discussion between citizens and candidates in order to give each candidate an equal opportunity to meet the local electorate and discuss the issues. In this way, all candidates, without discrimination or impartiality, will be offered a chance to present their programs and plans for the local council should they win in the elections. Additionally, citizens will be afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions and discuss their views of potential programs. Such open discussions have the added benefit of providing a basis for holding elected officials accountable in the future to do what they have promised.

Information meeting in each locality will be organized to meet candidates broken down in groups if necessary. In each meeting moderated by a facilitator, a small group of 5 or more candidates will briefly present their agendas and respond to all questions and inquires from the audience. Women voters and youth will be invited to participate. Although this proposed project is not intended to be a training program, it does incorporate important elements of indirect training.

Specifically, the project targeted the 11 districts in the West Bank, involving around 2,000 citizens and around 200 candidates at 22 town hall meetings to be conducted at two stages; an early stage that will focus on civic education aiming at encourage different sectors of society to actively participate and positively influence the election, and late stage that will be carried out during the election official campaigning period which will focus on the interaction between legislative candidates and citizens. All legislative candidates will be invited to participate and share their views, and constituents will have the opportunity to directly interact and ask questions of those who are seeking office.

The project aims to encourage a more active participation of the Palestinian citizens on the Legislative election and increase public confidence by facilitating active discussions between Palestinians and the candidates at the grassroots level. The project address these issues and further respond to the required public awareness necessary to build up the trust among the people in the election process by:

- Giving equal opportunity to candidates to communicate with public during the campaigning period
- Providing nonpartisan support to all candidates the chance to present there programs and agenda
- Giving voters an opportunity to listed and gathers information they need to evaluate candidates through betting a side-by-side comparison of the major contenders for an evaluation
- Promoting political culture and public debates
- Promoting civic education on the election regulations and stimulating citizen participation and interest
- Provide “candidates forums” where candidates could debate and discuss their views and proposals, with the participation of concerned citizens
- Issue a detailed report on the election results, as well as the election climate and practices, containing remarks and lessons learned. The conclusion will be documented and published in ATF’s Periodic Journal, *Shu’un Tanmawiyyeh*, helping to increase Palestinian literature on the subject – a critical activity in the Post-election stage.

Democratic Formation in Palestine

This initiative has been an ongoing project since 1998 and has produced seven consecutive reports culminating in the 2005 edition under the title of “The Annual Report on Democratic Formation in Palestine,” that covered the time period from January 1 through December 31, 2005. This is the only program that provides an independent comprehensive report and analysis of actions and activities influencing the state of governance and democracy in Palestine.

The overall objective of this project is to detect major trends reinforcing or weakening the process of democratic formation in Palestine through monitoring and analyzing the performance of public and civil society institutions, developing conclusions and recommendations and disseminating the outcome in a comprehensive annual report on the state of governance and democracy in Palestine.

The project targets all groups, governmental and non-governmental, that contribute to bringing about any changes to democratic development in Palestine. Monitors and evaluates the actions and activities of these groups. Provides a framework that highlights and assesses the effect and influence of these groups on governance and democracy.

Analyzes activities, identifies trends, pinpoints strengths and weaknesses and develops conclusions and recommendations, and provides a wide range of specific and quantitative information included in various tables and annexes to the report. Raises awareness through publishing and disseminating Periodic Reports and the Annual Report and conducting meetings to present and review the findings. Offers a credible source of information to decision-makers, researchers and organizations and individuals involved in governance, democracy and reform in Palestine and contributes to the historical record of the Palestinian people.

The Arab Thought Forum's Annual Report on Democratic Formation in Palestine is recognized as an important monitoring tool and record of state building in Palestine, and is considered a credible resource for Palestinian researchers, decision-makers and advocates for social change and reform.

The Seven Annual Report on Democratic Transformation was published in both Arabic and English, but it was difficult to hold the general discussion meeting due to closures within the territories at the time of publishing. This report has received a lot of attention and appreciation from public, national and journalistic sides; it is worth noting that the report's analysis and conclusions were especially relevant and essential in light of the reform process which started in the middle of 2002. The Arab Thought Forum's reports determined precisely which reforms were most critical and proposed ways to undertake them even before the issue of reform became a top national priority.

Development Affairs Journal "Shuun Tanmawiyyeh"¹

Through the ATF's Civil Society Participation Project, two editions of the ATF Development Affairs Journal, "Shu'un Tanmawiyyeh," were published in the year 2005. The Journal is printed in Arabic with an accompanying English Translation, and includes original articles, position papers, special reports and copies of pertinent documents. Copies of each edition are published and disseminated to government and non-governmental bodies, institutions, organizations and concerned individuals. A reserve of a limited number of copies are available through the ATF Resource Center for researchers and interested parties.

Publications and Research

In 2005, ATF completed eight main publications, in addition to its smaller publications, such as analytical reports and quarterly and monthly reports on democratic formation in Palestine. The main publications were:

1. Investigative Reporting... Training Manual
2. Human Values in the Press
3. Palestinian Political Map
4. Jerusalem District Electricity Company
5. Seventh Democratic Formation in Palestine Report (in both Arabic and English)
6. Issues #30 and #31 of *Shu'un Tanmawiya* (Developmental Affairs) Journal

Resource Center and Library

ATF continued its efforts to develop its Resource Center and Library by investing in new collections of books relevant to the nature of its programs and activities, and by taking inventory of existing collections and classifying them according to subject. The majority of books were electronically indexed to facilitate research and use of the center. The library now holds 3,800 books, 1,300 documents, 150 video tapes, and hundreds of pictures and maps.

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

¹For a content list of previous issues, see ATF website; www.multaqa.org

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.multaqa.org. In addition, newspapers are received on a daily basis and available to readers and researchers. Acquisitions, particularly those that fit the nature of ATF projects and interests, are regularly added to the library through a computerized classification system that makes the collection easier to access. In the year 2004, approximately 200 titles were added to the Library. The Library is open to the public during business hours and by special appointment in the evenings and on weekends. The ATF Library is an important resource for ATF staff members involved in ATF projects as well as for students, journalists and researchers from both the local and international community.

The ATF Website

The ATF Website www.multaqa.org was recently updated to include more recent projects and publications.

In the meantime, the site provides:

- Extensive overview of the ATF mission, objectives, programmes and publications.
- Arabic full version of the English page
- Access to Palestine offer qualitative and quantitative information to viewers and researchers

Public Relations

During 2004, ATF was keen to place special emphasis on developing its local and international public relationships, as well as the skills of its personnel, since both are considered vitally important for the continuity, vitality, durability and respected presence of the ATF at all levels.

With regard to public relations, a large number of public figures, local and international delegations visited the ATF headquarters during 2004 in order to familiarize themselves with its programs and activities and to receive its publications. Furthermore, ATF's presence at over 100 general and special activities – such as conferences, forums, workshops, meetings and training courses – held by tens of local and international institutions, was ascertained by the participation of all members of the ATF staff, whether administrative or project-oriented. While most of these activities were held locally, several were international; there was a precise and careful selection of such activities, weighing their importance to ATF's mission against financial constraints.

Major International Activities:

- Election workshop, Berlin, Germany, Hans Seidel, 1-2, February 2005.
- Good Governance conference, Dead Sea, Jordan 5-8 February 2005.
- Transparency Source Book workshop, Transparency International, Bahrain 17-25 February 2005.

- Conference on Good Governance for Development, the Dead Sea, Jordan, 6 -7 February 2005.
- Town management course, Habitat, Ismaelieh, Egypt, 14-20 May 2005.
- Civil Society Workshop on Political Pluralism and Electoral Processes in the B- MENA, *No Peace Without Justice* (NPWJ), Venice, Italy, 21-23 July 2005.
- Civil Society Dialogue on Transparency and Anti-corruption, G8-BMENA: Transparency International Amman, Transparency International, Cairo, 27-29 July 2005.
- Civil Society Dialogue on Transparency and Anti-corruption, G8-BMENA: Transparency International Amman, Jordan 27-29 August 2005.
- Civil Society Dialogue on Transparency and Anti-corruption, G8-BMENA: Transparency International Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, 24-28 September 2005.
- Special Meeting on Governance, Governance, *No Peace Without Justice* (NPWJ), Rabat, Morocco 1-4 October 2005.
- The Forum for the Future, Transparency International, Bahrain 11-12 November 2005.
- Development Cooperation and Corruption – a Complex Relation, The European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Transparency International, Brussels. November 29 - 30, 2005.
- Election Monitoring, Cairo, Egypt, NDI, December 4-8 2005.
- The1948 Atlas planning meeting on the, Braunschweig, Germany December 4-6, 2005, hosted by the Georg Eckart Institute for Textbook Research.
- Fund Raising Course, ALE exandreaia, Egypt Anna Linda Foundation, December 9-12 2005.
- Workshop on Source Book, Rabat, Morocco December 9-12 2005.

Regarding the development of the technical and administrative skills of the ATF team, staff attended local and international courses and workshops in order to both support the institution-building process and to develop individual specialized skills. Training subjects included administration, finance, research, and the technical aspects of personnel management. ATF carefully selected which activities best suited the needs of the institution, including considering the cost of the training, how it would help improve business management at the institution, and especially how it would contribute to increasing ATF's capacities and skills that could be used on the largest possible number of programs and activities.

Coordination and Networking

ATF has contributed to the establishment of non-governmental networking organizations in Palestine and participated in coalitions that aim to coordinate the activities of national social institutions. ATF's most important coordination and networking activities in 2004 were:

1. Palestinian NGO Network: Arab Thought Forum continues to be a member in the coordination committee of the network; it is also a member in two other critical committees: the Jerusalem Committee, which facilitates continuous coordination regarding the development of Jerusalem-based NGOs, and the Information Committee, which is responsible for publishing the network's news annex.
2. Palestinian Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN): ATF participated in the establishment of this national coalition, which aims to implement programs that foster integrity in governance and administration in Palestine. In addition to ATF, the coalition includes the following NGOs: Miftah, Center for Research and Studies, Muwatten, Mezan, Transparency International –Palestine Branch, Palestinian Council for External Relations, and Pal Trade.
3. General Union of Charitable Societies: Arab Thought Forum continues to coordinate with other member societies.
4. Transparency International : Contacts have been established with this world-wide institution, which has branches in more than 70 countries. These contacts are now developing into a productive relationship, especially since Palestinian Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN) was established, as it has become one of the branches of the institution.
5. Arab Network Against Corruption: At the Ninth Conference to Counter Corruption held in South Africa in 1999, a nucleus for an Arab network was founded; ATF was on the constituent assembly of the network. Since that time, the network has enlarged and expanded. At the Tenth Conference to Counter Corruption in Prague in 2001, and at the Eleventh Conference in Seoul in 2003, several meetings were held to issue a "Book of References" on the fight against corruption. Several Arab countries participated, including Palestine.
6. Palestinian Council of Human Rights Organizations: Because of Arab Thought Forum's work with the Citizens' Rights Center, ATF served as an active member of PCHRO and continued to contribute to the development of the council's general views and guidelines in the constitution and by-laws. In 2004, the council's composition was reviewed and reformulated to allow for the participation of more human rights institutions; the ATF contributed significantly in this regard.
7. National Committee for the Monitoring of Elections: Following its role in the 1995 presidential and legislative elections, ATF, together with other national institutions, contributed to the establishment of a National Elections Body. Specifically, ATF participated in the preliminary meetings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, contributed to the formulation of the by-laws of the body, and was nominated for and won the seat of secretariat in the body. In addition to the ATF, the following organizations participated: the General Union of Palestinian Women, Muwatten, Agricultural Relief Committees, Women's Legal and Social Counseling Center, the Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy, the Arab Studies Society, Panorama, and Civic Forum. In its capacity as coordinator of the Jerusalem Committee, ATF organized several meetings in its offices in Ar-Ram and Jerusalem, which lead to the formation of the Jerusalem Council in the Committee.

8. Coordination Committee of The National Society: The ATF participated in the establishment of the Coordination Committee of The National Society, and remains an active member. The committee serves to coordinate among the present national bodies in Palestine. In addition, ATF is active in a number of other committees, including: the Handicapped Affairs Committee, the Jerusalem Prisoners' Affairs Committee, the Committee on the Fight Against Drugs in Jerusalem, and the Committee of National Work Policies in coordination with the Ministry of NGO Affairs.

Future Prospects

The country is still passing through a stage of transition, and it is unclear what will be the final features of the Palestinian State and its institutions. Moreover, the political situation and relationship with the Israeli government are unstable and constantly shifting; the nature of this relationship continues to heavily influence internal conditions in Palestine and prospects for opening society. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to make projections about the future and to determine what programs and activities will be most effective and necessary for Palestinian development in the coming years. Because ATF feels that its current programs are effective in tackling some of the most critical issues in a broad range of subject areas under its mandate, it is not seeking to make substantial changes to its programmatic activities or to alter the general framework of its agenda.

The unfortunate reality is that a comprehensive inspection of the Palestinian situation indicates that conditions are not improving, but rather changing for the worse in many ways. With foresight, at an early stage of the *intifada*, ATF aligned the general framework of its programs to respond to the new reality; thus, the subject matter of ATF programs have begun to focus on issues related to the *intifada* and its effects at the political and human rights levels – including encroachments of basic rights to housing, decent living conditions, and survival.

The Palestinian people seem destined to live in the context of the unknown, and the unfortunate political prospects seem to shift between further deterioration, continued struggle, or the seemingly-unlikely possibility of improvement. It seems undoubtedly true that the Palestinian people will be forced to endure a period of suffering for the coming several years. Thus, at a time when the ATF is seeking to preserve its existence and expand its ability to give, we must establish our role in addressing the Palestinian question and serving the Palestinian people in light of the current realities and within the framework of our objectives, potential and available resources.

In the future, the Arab Thought Forum will focus on the following issues:

- Closely following the political process and the horizons for building a Palestinian future
- Assist in searching for and developing Palestinian National Agenda
- Human rights issues, democratic development, and administrative reform
- Assisting local councils in developing skills and effective functions
- Developing youth leadership
- Assist in recording Palestinian history

List of Tables

Table 1: Town Hall Meetings – 2005

Location and Focus	Date	No. Participant	M	F	Main Speakers
	June 22	45	39	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abraham Abu Gazale, Mayor
Al-Migraqa Municipality Municipal Development	June 29	40	40	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nabil Abu Akmael, Mayor
Al-Thahriyeh Municipality Needs of Citizens	Feb. 22	50	38	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hmad Shaheen, Higher Education Council Jalal Zbedeha
Romana District Needs of Citizens	Feb. 27	64	44	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nafa' Spihat, Mayor Abdella Brakat, Assistant Governor of Jenin Mayors of Kufer Dan, Kufer Kod, Hashmeh, Zopopa, and Al-Taiba
Tul Karem Camp Needs of the Camp	March 12	62	62	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hassan Khreisheh, PLC Member
Gaza Review and Planning	March 20	46	43	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heider Abed Al-Shaffee Abdella Hurani Khazi Hurani Abraham Abrish Naji Sharab
Al-Musder Municipality	April 7	40	40	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ayman Al-Maser, Mayor Hamdan Shaheen, Municipal Engineer
Wadi Gaza District Municipal Planning	May 13	30	30	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sallem Abu Aida, Mayor Sami Subbeh, Municipal Engineer
Ar-Ram District Needs of the Local Council and C	May 26	50	47	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serhan Salaymeh, Mayor Ahmad Egnem, Ministry of Local Governme Hatem Abed Al-Qader, PLC Member
Zatara Municipality Needs and Planning	July 27	115	100	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ibrahim Bajali, Mayor Sallah Attameri, Minister of Youth and Sport Ismael Faraj, Bethlehem Governorate
Jeuse District	Aug. 7	48	48	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thayez Salim, Mayor of Jeuse Municipality Ahmad Samhah, Jeuse Association
Needs of Ha-Izzetun – Gaza	Aug. 8	105	105	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nasser Hayall, Mayor of Gaza Marwan Haddad, Head of Ha-Izzetun Comm

Salfit District	Sept. 6	55	27	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buhan Jerrah, PLC Member • Mufid Abed-Rabo, PLC Member
Betunia District	Oct. 6	160	142	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mustafa Issa, Governor of Ramallah • Ahmad Rizzeq, Ramallah Police
Zawayideh Municipality	Nov. 13	50	50	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ahmad Abu Zaid, Mayor
Northern Gaza Needs of Victims of Occupation	Dec. 2	130	130	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Jammal, North Gaza Governorate • Kallil Samara, Mayor of Jabaliya
TOTAL		1,050	945	105	

Table 2: Public Debates 2005

Title	Date	Place	No. Participant	M	F
Role of Civil Society in Monitoring	February 24	Jerusalem	28	27	1
Working Jerusalemites: Suffering a	February 28	Ar-Ram	72	57	15
Sports Reality	May 20	Tul Karem	79	70	9
Prisoners from Jerusalem	August 16	Jerusalem	22	8	14
Needs and Roles of Youth in Societa Development and Decision-Making	September 6	Yabad	65	55	10
Threats of Judaization of Jerusalem	October 2	Jerusalem	20	18	2
Obstacles Facing Al-Quds Open Un Students	October 13	Tul Karem	65	16	49
Social Solidarity: Reality and Aspir	November 4	Tul Karem Can	100	100	0
Elections and Fear: The Importance Palestinian Decision-Making	December 27	Jenin	50	41	9
TOTAL			501	382	119

Table 3: Political Dialogues – Activist Round Table Meetings 2005

	Topic	Date	Place	No. Participa	Male	Female
1	Israeli Decision to Withdraw	Feb 21	Gaza	10	10	0
2	Opportunities and Obstacles Implementation of Political P	May 11	Al-Bireh	8	7	1
3	Role of Fatah Movement and Current Responsibilities	Sept 1	Ramallah	7	6	1
4	Post-Arafat Period	Dec 12	Gaza	30	30	0

Table 4: Candidate Forums in Support of Municipal Elections Project

District	Local Government	Date	No. of Candidates	No. of Candidates Participating	Number of Participants	Male	Female
Jerusalem	Beit Annan	Dec 16	21	18	230	182	48
	Al-Izzeriah	Dec 18	36	10	118	94	24
	Al-Izzeriah	Dec 20	36	9	155	117	38
	Al-Izzeriah	Dec 21	36	12	215	160	55
	Abu Dis	Dec 19	53	11	103	85	18
	Abu Dis	Dec 20	53	8	172	135	37
	Abu Dis	Dec 21	53	9	192	149	43
Tubas	Tubas	Dec 16	48	8	198	171	27
	Tubas	Dec 18	48	12	143	110	33
	Tubas	Dec 19	48	13	250	202	48
Jericho	Jericho	Dec 18	51	9	69	51	18
	Jericho	Dec 19	51	3	58	31	27
	Jericho	Dec 20	51	5	38	27	11
	Oja	Dec 15	14	7	90	84	6
	Oja	Dec 17	14	6	85	81	4
	Diuke and Nwaya	Dec 21	13	6	97	88	9
TOTAL			626	146	2,213	1,767	446

**Table 5: Third Stage of Local Government Election
01/12/2005 - 13/12/2005**

Day	Date	Local Government	Place	Total Participation
Tuesday	07/12/2005	Jenin	Hameed Altaher Centre	85
Wednesday	08/12/2005	Jenin	Hameed Altaher Centre	62
Saturday	10/12/2005	Albierh	In'ash Alusra Forum	45
Sunday	11/12/2005	Albierh	In'ash Alusra Forum	
Monday	12/12/2005	Ramallah	Commercial Room	52
Monday	12/12/2005	Nablus	Women's Union Forum	55
Tuesday	13/12/2005	Nablus	Women's Union Forum	79
Tuesday	13/12/2005	Ramallah	Commercial Room	31
Total:		8		409

Table 6: Investigative Reporting Project

Purpose of Meeting	Number of Meetings	Male	Female	Total Number of Participants
Working Groups	6	10	1	11
Training Courses	5	19	8	28
Training Workshops	5	13	8	21
Public Meetings	3	45	7	52
Total:	19	87	24	112

Table 7: Local Government Project

Topic	Date	No. of Participants	Male	Female
Planning Meeting	March 9	9	8	1
Working Group Meeting	March 17	9	8	1
Discussion of the Guidelines for Local Government	March 30	9	7	2
Discussion of the Guidelines for Local Government	April 12	7	6	1
Developing 3 Questionnaires	April 29	6	6	0
Evaluation and Planning Meeting	July 14	4	4	0
Discussion of the Report	July 15	6	5	1
Workshop: Members of PLC and Decision Makers, including MLG, Lawyers, and	Aug 10	140	132	8
Meeting to Discuss the Integrity Index	Oct 4	24	24	0
TOTAL		220	206	14

Table 8: Local government Project- Town hall meetings

Local Government Bodies	Total number of participants	Place	Date
Qalqilia	33	Municipality of Qalqilia	07/02/2005
An'abta	50	Municipality of An'abta	17/02/2005
Beit Fajar	28	Municipality of Beit Fajar	05/02/2005
Alzababda	16	Municipality of Alzababda	05/02/2005
Albeireh	15	Municipality of Albeireh	
Doora	26	Municipality of Doora	03/02/2005
Total	168		

Table 9: Local Government Performance

Activity	Female	Male	Total Participation	Date	Main Speakers
Workshop: sample of citizens from the municipality.	9	67	76	28/03/2005	Khalid Alqwasmi, Ministry of Local Government Burhan Jarar, PLC Marouf Zahran, Local Government Union Sample of Citizens
Conference on transparency in local government.	12	86	98	16/06/2005	Khalid Alqwasmi, Ministry of Local Government Burhan Jarar, PLC Marouf Zahran, Local Government Union Ahmad Gnim, Deputy of Local Government Omar Samha, Supervisor from Local Government
Total	21	153	174		

Table 10: Democracy Day Meetings 07/03/2005 - 22/03/2005

Date	District	Male	Female	Total Participation	Main Speakers
08/03/2005	Ramallah	78	9	87	Abed Aljawad Saleh A'zmi Alshua'ibi
09/03/2005	Bethlehem	53	10	63	Salah Alta'mari Dawood Alzeir Bshara Dawood Mitri Abu A'ita
10/03/2005	Hebron	85	11	95	RafeeqAlnatsheh JamalAlshoubaki SuliemanAbuSneineh Ali Alqawasmi
12/03/2005	Jerusalem	19	5	24	Hani Ala'isawi Hani Ghosheh
13/03/2005	Nablus	31	17	48	Hussein Ala'raj Mua'weia Almasri Kamel Alafagani Dalal Salameh
16/03/2005	Doora	160	18	178	Rafiq Alnatsheh Nabeel Amro

					Abass Zaki Mustafa Rjoub
17/03/2005	Jenin	42	1	43	Qadoura Musa Mahmoud Allabadi Hussein Ala'raj
19/03/2005	Tulkarm	66	10	76	Hussan Khreisheh Fathi Qara'wi Nayef Jaradat
19/03/2005	Jericho	80	9	89	Sa'eb A'riqat Majid Mayor of Jericho
20/03/2005	Salfeet	40	1	41	Shaher Ishtayeh Abed Alraheem Taha
21/03/2005	Qalqilia	46	8	54	Othman Gashash Mustafa Almalki, Mayor of Qalqilia
22/03/2005	Tubas	160	20	180	Qadoura Musa A'qab Dagma Mahmoud Allabadi
Total:		874	104	978	35

Table 11: National Committee for Following the Code of Conduct

Date	Place	Activity
20/09/2005	Ramallah	Establish the High Committee to follow-up the signatories to the Code of Conduct.
28/09/2005	Ramallah	Exchange views on the content of the Conduct of Conduct and establish a small committee consisting of Hamas, Fatah, Popular Wing, Central Elections Committee and ATF.
01-13/10/2005	Multiple locations	Drafting Committee for the Code of Conduct establishes lines of communication with the political parties to guarantee their signature to the code.
15/10/2005	Ramallah	Proclamation of the Code of Conduct and preliminary signing by the political parties.
17/10/2005	Ramallah	Conference for the signing and declaration for the Code of Conduct.
10/11/2005	Ramallah	Discuss mechanisms that can be used to monitor party adherence to the Conduct of Conduct in each district.
24/11/2005	Ramallah	Meeting by a sub-committee to discuss Hamas' reasons for its initial refusal to sign the Code of Conduct. Devising internal monitoring rules and procedures to regulate the High Committee and divide tasks amongst the members.
06/12/2005	Ramallah	Report on the outcomes from the meetings held to discuss Hamas' reasons for its initial refusal to sign the Code of Conduct. Establish sub-committees in each district to monitor the Code of Conduct.
17/12/2005	Ramallah	Declaration of High Committee's internal regulating and announce tasks for each member according to the following:
26/12/2005		Meetings with party lists to explain to the principles of the Code of Conduct prior to official signing and obtain their commitment to the code.
21/12/2005	Legislative Council, Ramallah and Gaza via video conference	Video conference of the High Committee in the West Bank and Gaza.
24/12/2005	Gaza	First meeting of the Gaza High Committee.
28/12/2005	Legislative Council, Ramallah	Discuss the issue of Hamas who are yet to sign to the Code of Conduct. Workshops with independent candidates and electoral lists who have signed the code. Prepare for a meeting with the Ministry of the Interior.
28/12/2005	Interior Ministry, Ramallah	High Committee meeting with the Ministry of the Interior.
29/12/2005	Gaza	Establishing sub-committees in Gaza.
29/12/2005	Ramallah	Course training on the Code of Conduct for local observers.
31/12/2005	Legislative	Preparing for a media conference on the Code of Conduct.

	Council, Ramallah	Discuss the violations of the Code of Conduct and sub-committee reports.
03/01/2005	Palestinian Media Centre, Ramallah	High Committee media conference on election advertising beginning on 3/01/2005. Participants: Abed Alrahman Abu A'rafah, Ahmad Suboh, Amneh Alrimawi and Ahmad Rwaidi.
03/01/2005	Gaza	Discussion on whether to open an operations room in Gaza.
05/01/2005	Jerusalem	Urgent media conference on Hamas' letter of agreement to sign the Code of Conduct.
14/01/2005	Ramallah	Discussion on what operation room activities will entail on the election day, 25/01/2005.
17/01/2005	Ramallah	Discussion of sub-committee and local observer reports.
18/01/2005	Gaza	Follow-up of reports and complaints recorded by the local observers.
19/01/2005	Ramallah	Discussion of the primary report on violations of the Code of Conduct. Preparing for a media conference to publicize the violations.
22/01/2005	Ramallah	Media conference on the role of the local media during the election campaign.
26/01/2005	Ramallah	Media conference to announce a report on the commitment to the Code of Commitment. Participants: Abed Alrahman Abu A'rafah, Ahmad Rwaidi, Ziad Dayyeh.
14/02/2005	Ramallah	Workshop for the High Committee and ATF staff to discuss positive and negative outcomes from the Code of Conduct.

Table 12: Summary of Complaints and Violations to the Code of Conduct 03/01/2006 - 24/01/2006

A: West Bank

Place	Number of Reports	Number of Cases of Violations
Ramallah	7	28
Bethlehem	7	34
Jerusalem	10	29 number of violations committed by the Israeli authorities.
Jenin	4	6
Hebron	4	13
Qalqilia	4	5
Nablus	3	15
Jericho	2	4
Salfeet	2	8
Tulkarm	3	9
Tubas	-	-

B: Gaza

Gaza	2	17
Northern Gaza	3	16
Middle District of Gaza	3	33
Khan Younis	3	24
Rafah	4	31
Total:	61	242