



Arab Thought Forum

Annual Report 2004

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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.

ATF 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 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 28 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 2004 was directed towards its implementation of four main projects:

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, 16 town hall meetings were held with the attendance of 1,050 citizens, of which 105 were women.

The Town Hall Meetings conducted by the Arab Thought Forum in the year 2004 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, new Town Hall Meetings were launched in small towns, refugee camps and villages previously not reached by the project.

Thirty-eight 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:

- Voicing concerns over repeated Israeli violations and offenses against the infrastructure
- Problems of public schools and lack of classrooms and equipment
- Insufficient prioritization of Palestinian youth needs, and lack of sports equipment at
- The need for increasing social solidarity among citizens in light of the current situation
- Local council budgets and spending mechanisms
- Automobile theft
- Health conditions and the need to open specialized medical centers in different areas
- Unlicensed building and illegal occupation of public and government property
- Municipal services, such as sewerage, garbage dumps, general sanitation, power supply,
- High level of 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 municipality

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 2004:

In 2004, the Arab Thought Forum organized 13 public debates to address the most concerning social issues. A total of 501 citizens, including 119 women, turned out for these sessions.

Social Solidarity: Reality and Aspiration

Date: 4 November 2004

Emphasized the importance of Palestinian solidarity in light of Israeli measures in the Palestinian Territories, including the seizure policy. The session discussed the roles of various governmental and nongovernmental institutions in safeguarding and providing a decent life to families of those killed or wounded, to those with special needs and to poor families.

Speakers: Iz Ad Din Sharif – Tulkarem Governor, Ammar Badawi – Tulkarem District Mufti, and Hasan Khrisha – First Deputy of the Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker.

Jerusalemite Prisoners

Date: 16 August 2004

Focused on the issue of Jerusalemite prisoners and the problems they face as a result of Israeli policies and practices, such as creating obstacles to family visits, and other problems related to arrests, detention centers, and trials.

Speakers: Prisoners' families, legal and NGOs representatives.

The Threat of Judaization in Jerusalem

Date: 2 October 2004

Discussed political points of reference to Jerusalem and Israeli efforts to change the character of the city, including, most importantly, repeated attempts to desecrate Islamic shrines, and the proposed skeletal city design by the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem, which aims to deface geographic and topographic features of the city.

Speakers: Sheikh Dr. Ikrima Sabri, Ali Abu Hilal, Fadil Tahboub, Rasim Ibadat, and Hani Isawi

Jerusalemite Working Sector: Suffering and Future

Date: 28 February 2004

In cooperation with the Council of Work Sectors in Jerusalem District, ATF held a session in which experts presented several papers on health, education, culture and employment. The workshop led to the reformation of the Council of Work Sectors in Jerusalem District and the reactivation of its mandate to confront these challenges.

Speakers: Ghassan Khateeb – Minister of Labor, Hussein Abu Gharbiyeh, Azzam Abu Soud, Ibrahim Daqaq, Farsin Agapikian, and Taher Namari

Role of Civil Society in Monitoring Elections

Date: 24 February 2004

Following the formation of the supervisory Palestinian Central Elections Committee and the National Committee to Monitor Elections, this session discussed rules and regulations which help guarantee integrity in elections' implementation, as well as the importance of preliminary work in preparing the Palestinian people for participation. Significantly, participants pointed out the need to have complete coordination among national institutions and the different national forces in order to guarantee the widest possible participation in any future elections, including the importance of organizing to ensure the reformulation of the Law of Elections to guarantee the participation of political parties and to pave the way for women to reach decision-making positions.

Speakers: Nasif Muallem, Talib Awad, Ahmed Rwaidi, members of the National Committee to Monitor Elections

Sports Situation

Date: 20 May 2004

The session dealt with the discussion of sports facilities and the attempts to develop them by reactivating contacts between institutions and ministries responsible for sports activities in Tulkarem. It was determined that the roles of athletes and government institutions need to be reinvigorated to support sports activities.

Speakers: Jamal Tarif - Director of Education at Tulkarem District, Ahmed Asmar - Coaches Committee, Ala Halob - Ministry of Sports, and Arif Awni - Social Youth Center.

Needs and Roles of Youth in Societal Development

Date: 6 September 2004

The session discussed the participation of youth, especially women, in social development and the importance of reinforcing their participation by developing their awareness of social issues, their rights, and how to improve their leadership skills. It also discussed the importance of voter registration for the youth.

Speakers: Afaf Zibdeh - Social Committees of Women Work, Mufeed Hassan - General Association of Palestinian Labor Unions

Obstacles Facing Al Quds Open University Students

Date: 12 October 2004

The session discussed the obstacles and problems facing Al Quds Open University students, such as tuition and textbook costs, limited specializations, the condition of university facilities, the spread of facilities throughout Palestine, and future employment prospects. Participants concluded with a number of recommendations: mainly, to increase the number of specializations offered according to the needs of the Palestinian labor market, to develop university programs, modernize the facilities, increase use of the internet, install laboratories, and provide employment opportunities and services.

Speakers: Jamal Tarif - Ministry of Education, Walid Balbisis - Labor Ministry, Bilal Thawaia - Labor Unions, Rami Higazi - Student Senate, and Ibrahim Dalaq - Al Quds Open University

Elections and their Importance in Palestinian Decision-Making

Date: 2 December 2004

In light of the approaching presidential elections, political party representatives were invited to present their intentions, views, and predictions about the outcome of the elections, and to discuss its political impacts.

Speakers: Azmi Fraih - Fattah Movement, Suheil Suliman - People's Party, and Nada Toweir - Democratic Front

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:

Israeli Decision to Withdraw from Gaza

Date:

The meeting discussed the political and social implications of the Israeli decision to withdraw from Gaza Strip, the potential challenges Palestinians may face, and what will be required of Palestinians politically, economically and on the ground.. The meeting was like a brainstorming session to analyze views, study implications and present decisions to concerned parties. Participants came up with several recommendations regarding legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people, weapons control, chaos prevention, and the need to identify a single final authority and the to guarantee that all political factions acknowledge it.

Speakers: Haidar Abed Shafi, Abdalla Hurani, Ghazi Sorani, Ibrahim Abrash, Tayseer Muhsin, Nabil Tarazi, Rabah Muhanna, and Rajai Abu Sha'ban

Opportunities and Obstacles to the Implementation of Political Pluralism

Date: 12 May 2004

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

Participants: Qays Abed karim, Wasil Abu Yousef, Abed Latiff Ghaith, Ali Abu Hilal, and Nazmi Ju'ba (representing five different political parties)

Role of Fateh Movement and its current Responsibilities

Date: 1 September 2004

The meeting dealt with the main features of the current political crisis, the possibilities of overcoming it, various parties' responsibilities and roles, necessary measures, corruption cases, the role of Fateh movement in the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the impact of foreign and regional interference on the movement.

Speakers: Hani Hasan, Abbas Zaki – Fateh Movement Central Committee, Azzam Ahmad, Sameh Abed Fattah – Revolutionary Council of Fateh, Mohammed Bairouti – Director of Mobilization and Organization at Fateh Movement.

Post-Arafat Period

Date: 12 December 2004

The meeting discussed the implications of the passing away of President Arafat and the possible developments of affairs at the internal level, as well as the prospects for the struggle against the occupation.

Speakers: Rafiq Abu Salsalah, Abdalla Hourani, Nabil Tarazi, Jamil Shehada, and Salah Saqa

Developing a Model for Accountable and Transparent Local Government

During this season of 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, the project will culminate in a general conference in the middle of the year 2005 to propose recommendations for development and improved performance.

One of the most important outcomes of the project in 2004 was the formation of a team committed to following up with the implementation of the project's recommendations. The team includes representatives from the Ministry of Local Government and the Palestinian Local Bodies Union. They are: Hussein Araj, Salih Hamdan, Yasser Jaradat, Issam Aqil, and Mahir Zahaika. Additionally, the *Performance Guidelines Manual in the Palestinian Local Bodies Union* was also produced. The manual included 14 scales to measure performance: Basics and References, Planning and Follow-up, Abidance by Cost and Quality Standards, Administration, Implementation, Need for Service, Social Partnership, Client Expectations, Financial Resources, Financial Management, Ecological Benefit, Cultural and Entertainment Interests, Participation in Providing Social Security, Growth, and Reports.

Six local bodies were chosen from the targeted municipalities; in the selection process, population, geographical distribution, municipality size, and range of services offered were taken into consideration. The localities selected were: Tulkarem and El Bireh (large municipalities), Qabatya and Dhahriya (average size towns), and Zababdeh and Taffuh (small towns). Three questionnaires were developed in order to research the de facto situations of the targeted councils so as to prepare a comprehensive report; the questionnaires targeted heads and

members of the local councils, heads of departments, and local citizens. A report titled “Performance of the Palestinian Local Bodies Union” was prepared.

On August 10, 2004 we held a workshop to draw together experts and decision-makers. The Minister of Local Government, Jamal Shobaki; Deputy Minister Hussein Araj; PLC Secretary of the Internal Committee and Local Government, Burhan Jarar; Deputy of Local Government Authority, Ma’ruf Zahran; his executive manager of the union and its administrative team; a team of specialized personnel, such as General Directors, in various ministries; and heads of 140 local councils. The Accountability Index was also prepared; it is based on basic components like transparency, accountability, and limited authority. As for the elements of the Index, they are: Ethical Conduct, Handling Classified Information, Political Impartiality, Clash of Interests, Designations and Appointments of Personnel, Commitments, Personal Interests, Tenders, Corruption, Management of Financial Resources, Hospitality, Gifts and Sponsorship of Activities. The Index also identified the main rules and regulations which were adopted as performance criteria.

Discussion and development of this index were conducted during the expanded meeting held on October 4, 2004, with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Local Government, Palestinian Legislative Council, Local Bodies Union, and a number of relevant non-governmental organizations.

Laying a Foundation for Investigative reporting in the Palestinian Printed Press

Given the important role of the press in the reform process and democratic development, this project aims to increase the ability and develop skills of Palestinian journalists to write and publish journalistic reports. This will be accomplished through the development of a Palestinian Journalistic Manual on the criteria and principles for the art of journalistic reporting according to international standards. The project also seeks to train Palestinian journalists how to write reports according to the criteria and principles covered in the manual. Since such work requires the availability of some kind of protection for the journalist and his means of communication, the project intends to come out with recommendations formulated by a team to lay the foundation for a draft bill or modifications of the law to guarantee the rights of journalists and define their duties.

In general, the project targets Palestinian journalists (correspondents and editors) in the West Bank who specialize 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 main outcomes of the project in 2004 were:

- Formation of a taskforce to follow up on the implementation of the different stages of the project. The team included: Jawdat Manna, ex-lecturer of Mass Media at Beir Zeit University; Hasan Abdallah, writer and journalist; Dhiab Khalid Bani Odeh, from *Al Hayat Al Jadida*; Abeer Barghouthi, from *Al Hayat Al Jadida*, Mohd Abu Khdeir, from *Al Quds*, Mohammad Suliman, from the Ministry of Information; and Nasir Nimer, Nafez Bani Odeh and Naim Toubassi from the Journalists Union. The work of the task force included the preparation of questionnaires to survey the present condition of journalistic

reporting in the Palestinian press, and it included heads and proprietors of Palestinian newspapers, journalists and citizens.

- Meeting some pioneers of journalism in Palestine: Ahmed Suboh - Deputy Minister of Information, Jack Khazmo - Editor in Chief at *Baiader Journal*, Hafiz Bargouthi - Head Editor at *Al Hayat* Newspaper, Hanna Sinniora - Chief Editor at *Jerusalem Post*, Abed Nasr Najjar - Secretary Editor at *Al Ayyam* Newspaper, Marwan Abu Zuluf - Chief Editor at *Al Quds* newspaper, Nabil Amr - former Minister of Information and one of the founders of *Al Hayat* Newspaper, and Naim Tubassi - head of the Journalists Union.
- Increase in the number of Palestinian mass media and national institutions providing documentation and information for research purposes.
- Producing the "Principles of Journalistic Work Manual," focusing on the importance of independence, impartiality, honesty, accountability, service of community, preciseness, objectivity, justice, and fairness in reporting.
- Issuing the study titled "Journalistic Investigation in the Palestinian Written Media". The study included international criteria for news reports, characteristics of Palestinian written journalism, impressions of public opinion, factors influencing prospects for the development of news reports, and journalists' needs.
- Holding a workshop, with the participation of the Ministry of Information, Journalists Union, Palestinian Legislative Council, academics, journalists, and other relevant parties, to highlight the issue of journalistic reporting in Palestine.
- Appointing trainers – namely, Hisham Abdalla, Nash't Aqtash, Subhi Hamdan, Nabhan Khrisha and Nathir Mjali – in the third stage of the project.
- Holding a training course from September 18 until October 30, 2004, with the participation of thirty Palestinian journalists. The main characteristics of the course were as follows:
 - Four intensive training days on the art and technique of writing news reports. The training session was followed by the trainees' production of reports within one month, and review of these reports by trainers during the periodic weekly sessions.
 - Presenting the first draft of these news reports at a workshop which included a committee of news editors from local newspapers. The participants were Mohd Nubani, Abed Nasr Najjar, Hafiz Bargouthi, Nathir Mjali.
 - Fourteen reports produced by the trainees were published in the main local newspapers.
 - Preparation of the "Palestinian Journalist Manual "
 - A workshop on the art of news reporting was held in Gaza on December 29; it made several recommendations highlighting the importance of news reports and the need to provide protection to journalists.

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.

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.

Conflict Resolution 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.

Jerusalem District Electricity Company

The Palestinian Electricity Company is facing a number of difficulties and challenges in its dealings with the Palestinian citizens, and this strained relationship is exposing the company to high risks. Given the importance of the issue, ATF determined to study the situation and to uncover all relevant details through a public survey. The survey sought to identify general trends and citizens' views about the company-customer relationship, and is intended to be a preliminary step that will help us find logical solutions and highlight present and future risks facing the company. Following our analysis, we will formulate and present recommendations concerning what steps are necessary in order to save the company from crisis.

Participants: Hatem Abed Qadir, Qadura Fares - PLC, Ziad Hab Rih - Executive Authority, engineer Hussein Natour - Ministry of Local Government, Yousef Zumr - Ministry of Finance, Ahmed Jbara Abu Sukar – President's Advisor For Prisoners Affairs, General Munir Aboshi, Palestinian Electricity Company Administrative Board headed by Hanna Naser.

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 2004, ATF focused 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; however, since only 36 Palestinian local councils will take part the elections, and these elections will be held at different times, ATF's work in this area is not yet complete. From December 15-21, 2004, ATF organized 16 town hall meetings in seven localities where elections would be held. The meetings were at the following locations:

Bethany, Abu Deis, Beit Anan/Jerusalem District – 7 meetings
Jericho, Awja, Diyok, Nuwi'ma/Jericho District – 6 meetings
Tobas/Tobas District – 3 meetings

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. Of the 236 candidates invited, 146 opted to participate.

The number citizens who attended meetings was 2,213, including 1,767 men and 446 women. The women in attendance were effective in their participation; some of the candidates recognized them for their excellent articulation of their views and comments. The significant participation of youth was also noticeable, as their numbers accounted for 65% of those in attendance. It is worth noting that 27 male and female university students who had previously participated in ATF's Youth Leadership Program assisted in organizing the meetings by helping to distribute invitations, organize and facilitate meetings, and prepare reports.

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

Democratic Formation in Palestine

This initiative has been an ongoing project since 1998 and has produced six consecutive reports culminating in the 2004 edition under the title of "The Annual Report on Democratic Formation in Palestine," that covered the time period from January 1 through December 31, 2003. 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 Six 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 Tanmawiyeh"¹

Through the ATF's Civil Society Participation Project, two editions of the ATF Development Affairs Journal, "Shu'un Tanmawiyeh," were published in the year 2003. 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.

Two issues of *Shu'un Tanmawiyeh*, the quarterly Journal of ATF, has been published during the year 2004.

¹For a content list of previous issues, see our website.

Publications and Research

In 2004, ATF completed ten 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. Palestinian Local Councils' Performance Manual
2. Measurement of Performance of Palestinian Local Councils (Research Study)
3. Index of Accountability in Palestinian Local Councils
4. Principles of Journalistic Work Manual
5. Journalistic Reporting in the Palestinian Written Media (Research Study)
6. Democratic Formation in Palestine Report (in both Arabic and English)
7. Issues #28 and #29 of *Shu'un Tanmawiya* (Developmental Affairs) Journal
8. Annual Report (in English)
9. Jerusalem District Electricity Company Report
10. Local Elections Report

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 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 is currently being updated to include more recent and current projects and publications, and to offer qualitative and quantitative information to viewers and researchers. In the meantime, the site provides a general overview of the ATF mission and objectives as well as its implementation of forums and previous publications.

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:

- Principles of Ethics in Journalism Seminar – Salzburg, February 2004.
- Special Meeting on Conflict Resolution – Salzburg, October 2004. Participants included Adel Yahia, Salim Tamari, Adel Manna, Hilga Bomfarten, Albert Agazriyan, Nazmi Gu'ba, Jad Issaq, Abbas Abed Haq, Azzam Abu Soud, Abdel Raman Abu Arafah, and Maha Taweel.
- Workshop on Arab Countries' References Book – Beirut, September 2004.
- Workshop on Safe Coalition – Amman, September 2004.
- Submitting an Intervention before the UN Special Fact Finding Committee on the Israeli Violations of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – Cairo, April 2004.
- Workshop on Human Rights and Economic and Social Rights – Finland, 2004.
- Libraries Course – Damascus, April 2004.
- Youth Leadership Course – Switzerland, February 2004.
- Principles of Democracy Course – Turkey, October 2004.

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 responded 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

- Human rights issues, democratic development, and administrative reform
- Preparations for elections at various levels – presidential, legislative and local
- Opening better opportunities for visually impaired students and others with special needs
- Increasing the capacity of journalists to use written media to promote reform and openness
- Assisting local councils in developing the skills and acquiring the tools necessary to be most effective in their functions, and to use best practices standards for service delivery

List of Tables

Table 1
Town Hall Meetings – 2004

Location and Focus	Date	No. Particip	M	F	Main Speakers
Aum Al-Nasser Municipality Municipal Development	June 22	45			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abraham Abu Gazale, Mayor
Al-Migraqa Municipality Municipal Development	June 29	40			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nabil Abu Akmael, Mayor
Al-Thahriyeh Municipality Needs of Citizens	Feb. 22	50			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hmad Shaheen, Higher Education Council Jalal Zbedeha
Romana District Needs of Citizens	Feb. 27	64			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nafa' Spihat, Mayor Abdella Brakat, Assistant Governor of Jenin Mayors of Kufer Dan, Kufer Hashmeh, Tank, Zopopa, and
Tul Karem Camp Needs of the Camp	March 12	62			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hassan Khreisheh, PLC Member
Gaza Review and Planning	March 20	46			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heider Abed Al-Shaffee Abdella Hurani Khazi Hurani Abraham Abrish Naji Sharab
Al-Musder Municipality	April 7	40			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ayman Al-Maser, Mayor Hamdan Shaheen, Municipal Council
Wadi Gaza District Municipal Planning	May 13	30			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sallem Abu Aida, Mayor Sami Subbeh, Municipal Council
Ar-Ram District Needs of the Local Council and Citizens	May 26	50			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serhan Salaymeh, Mayor Ahmad Egnem, Ministry of Government Hatem Abed Al-Qader, PLC Member
Zatara Municipality	July 27	115			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ibrahim Bajali, Mayor

Needs and Planning					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sallah Attameri, Minister of Sports • Ismael Faraj, Bethlehem Go
Jeuse District	Aug. 7		48		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thayez Salim, Mayor of Jeuse Municipality • Ahmad Samhah, Jeuse Asso
Needs of Ha-Izzetun – Gaza	Aug. 8		105		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasser Hayall, Mayor of Gaza • Marwan Haddad, Head of Ha-Izzetun Committee
Salfit District	Sept. 6		55		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buhann Jerrah, PLC Member • Mufid Abed-Rabo, PLC Me
Betunia District	Oct. 6		160		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mustafa Issa, Governor of Ramallah • Ahmad Rizzeq, Ramallah Po
Zawayideh Municipality	Nov. 13		50		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ahmad Abu Zaid, Mayor
Northern Gaza Needs of Victims of Occupation	Dec. 2		130		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Jammal, North Gaza Governorate • Kallil Samara, Mayor of Jab
			1,05		

Table 2
Public Debates 2004

Title	Date	Place	No. Partic	M	F
Role of Civil Society in Monitoring Elections	February 24	Jerusalem	28	27	1
Working Jerusalemites: Suffering Future	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 Social 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 University Students	October 13	Tul Karem	65	16	49
Social Solidarity: Reality and Aspirations	November 4	Tul Karem C	100	100	0
Elections and Fear: The Importance of Palestinian Decision-Making	December 27	Jenin	50	41	9
TOTAL			501	382	119

Table 3
Political Dialogues – Activist Round Table Meetings 2004

	Topic	Date	Place	No. Participa	Male	Female
1	Israeli Decision to Withd from Gaza	Feb 21	Gaza	10	10	0
2	Opportunities and Obsta Before the Implementati Political Pluralism	May 11	Al-Bireh	8	7	1
3	Role of Fatah Movement 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 Govern	Date	Numb Candi	Number of Ca Participa	Numbe Particip	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 Inw	Dec 21	13	6	97	88	9
TOTAL			626	146	2,213	1,767	446

Table 5
Investigative Reporting Project

Meeting	Number of Meetings	Number of Participants	Male	Female
Working Group	6	11	10	1
Training Courses	5	27	19	8
Training Meetings	5	21	13	8
Town Hall Meetings	3	52	45	7
TOTAL	19	112	87	24

Table 6
Local Government Project

Topic	Date	Number of Participants	Male	Female
Planning Meeting	March	9	8	1
Working Group Meeting	March	9	8	1
Discussion of the Guidelines for Local Government	March	9	7	2
Discussion of the Guidelines for Local Government	April	7	6	1
Developing 3 Questionnaires	April	6	6	0
Evaluation and Planning Meeting	July	4	4	0
Discussion of the Report	July	6	5	1
Workshop: Members of PLC and Decision Makers, including MLG, Lawyers, and	Aug	140	132	8
Meeting to Discuss the Integrity Index	Oct	24	24	0
TOTAL		220	206	14

Table 7
Jerusalem District Electricity Company Project

Activities	Date	Number of Participants	Male	Female
Workshop	Sept 18	50	47	3
Questionnaire		150	75	75
TOTAL		200	122	78

