



مركز تطوير المؤسسات الأهلية الفلسطينية  
NGO Development Center

**United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian  
People  
International response to the humanitarian and economic  
needs of the Gaza Strip**

**Plenary II: Looking ahead: Identifying the most urgent humanitarian,  
reconstruction and development needs**

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I would like to start by extending my appreciation to the organizers of the conference and the Bureau of the Committee for giving the NGO Development Center this opportunity to take part in the seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people and for providing the inputs, from the perspective of the NGO sector, to the international response to the humanitarian and economic needs of the Gaza Strip. Specially, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Committee for the continuous efforts it exerts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self determination, their right to the independent State of Palestine, to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people. With our focus on Gaza during this critical period of political, humanitarian and financial crises, cooperation with the civil society is essential in order to mobilize international solidarity and support to the Palestinian people.

## **I. GAZA: Prior to and the Aftermath of the Israeli Military Operations in December 2008**

### **a. Gaza prior to Israel's military offensive on December 27, 2008**

It is imperative to take a step back and look at the situation in the Gaza Strip prior to Israel's 22 day military offensive which began on December 27, 2008. Notwithstanding Israel's unilateral disengagement of Gaza in 2005, the fact that Gaza remains occupied territory means that Israel's actions towards the people and territory must be measured against standards of international humanitarian law and Israel must be held accountable for these violations. On September 19, 2007, Israel's Security Cabinet declared Gaza to be "hostile territory." Following this declaration, Israel cut fuel and electricity supply to the Gaza Strip, and has dramatically decreased the number of humanitarian aid and commercial import, exercised substantial control of Gaza's six land crossings, completely controlled Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, in clear violation of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) of 2005.

Even though Israel declared its unilateral disengagement and claims that it no longer is responsible for the Gaza Strip, the test for determining whether a territory is occupied under international law is effective control,<sup>1</sup> and not the permanent physical presence of the occupying power's military

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<sup>1</sup> *Democratic Republic of Congo v. Uganda*, International Court of Justice, 2005, paras. 173 and 174

forces in the territory in question. The strangulation over Gaza, land and people, remained for over 18 months prior to Israel's military offensive, known as 'Operation Cast Lead.'

#### **b. Israel's Military Actions in Gaza (starting December 27, 2008)**

Now that the smoke has temporarily settled from Gaza's skies, local and international human rights organizations began reporting about the utter devastation that took place throughout the course of Israel's 22 day assault. According to statistics by the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, at least 1,285 Palestinians were killed, of which 895 were civilians, including 280 children and 111 women. Another 167 of the dead were civil police officers, most of whom were killed on the first day of the bombing when they were graduating from a training course. More than 4,000 houses were completely destroyed, as were 28 public civilian facilities, 29 educational institutions, 30 mosques, 10 charitable societies, 60 police stations and 121 industrial and commercial workshops<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Israel's twenty-two day bombardment has resulted in extensive damage to homes and public infrastructure.

## **II. Socio-Economic Implications in the Aftermath of the Israeli Military Operations**

Various institutions have undertaken rapid assessments to assess the initial damage and immediate need in the Gaza Strip. A rapid assessment conducted by CARE in partnership with Alpha International found that, 95% of households reported a high level of fear among children, with more than half of all children suffering from bed-wetting (62%), nervousness (73%), increased aggressiveness (61%), sleeplessness (87%), nightmares (79%), headaches and stomach-aches (57%).<sup>3</sup>

A survey conducted by the Shelter and IDP group of OCHA over the period between 22 and 25 January found that in 48 surveyed localities/neighbourhoods comprised of 10,847 households,

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<sup>2</sup> Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Weekly Report: On Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, No. 03/2009, 15 – 21 January 2009 [http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/NW\\_report/English/2008/22-01-2009.htm](http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/NW_report/English/2008/22-01-2009.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Gaza Survey: 95% of respondents report fear and signs of distress in their children: 56% of respondents are hosting displaced people, Press Release by CARE, January 21, 2009

64,023 people were still staying with host families. The survey also found that 45,843 people were staying in shelters.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent assessment conducted by the UNDP to assess attitudes and perceptions of Gazan's in the aftermath of Israel's military operations, the study found that, more than one third of household surveyed, 37% faced illness or health problems. There was a higher frequency of health problems in households in refugee camps (40%) than in those in cities (34%) and villages (34%). Furthermore, 37% of household were in need of primary health care services and more than one fourth of these households could not access these services.

The latest Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have led to extensive damage to the agriculture sector including the razing of thousands of agricultural areas, trees, green houses, roads, water wells, water network facilities and smallholder farms. As Palestinians are mainly an agricultural producing society, the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector, of which more than 70% has been destroyed by Israel, is of utmost importance among the immediate needs for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip.

The UNDP assessment found that the income poverty rate in the Gaza Strip is 65%. In real numbers, this means that out of the estimated 1,416,543 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, approximately 920,750 live in poverty. Of those 524,120 are extremely poor. 72% of families, affecting about 1,019,910 people do not have any alternative way to face financial hardship, let alone pulling themselves out of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. Role of NGOs**

Palestinian NGOs have played a vital role in the fabric of Palestinian society since before the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and no one can dispute the significance of these organizations in strengthening the steadfastness of Palestinians in their land. Palestinian NGOs played major roles in building the national infrastructure of sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and cultural and intellectual life. This has been achieved through: a.) the

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<sup>4</sup> Early Recovery rapid Needs Assessment, Draft Sectoral Assessment Report, United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for oPt (OHCHR) and UNDP, February 3, 2009

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Development Program/Program of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP), Inside Gaza: Attitudes and perceptions of the Gaza Strip residents in the aftermath of the Israeli military operations, February 2008.

active participation of NGOs in drawing development plans despite restrictions imposed by the Israeli military occupation; b.) the performance of relief programs and activities, and; c.) through their active participation in political struggle and resistance.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Palestinian NGOs have been able to sustain themselves despite changing political environments, harsh economic conditions and ongoing political instability. Palestinian NGOs are deeply embedded in the community across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and despite shortfalls, there is no doubt that they are resilient and continue to play an important role in relieving, improving and upgrading services and programs while at the same time challenging the effects of Israel's military occupation. NGOs in Palestine have played a historic role in advancing social, cultural and economic needs of hundreds of local communities; and have taken on the additional task of filling in for the non-existent or absent state during the occupation and before and after the establishment of the PA.

In a mapping survey of Palestinian NGOs conducted by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) in 2007, the survey revealed that the number of NGOs operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip reached 1,495. (32%) of these NGOs are concentrated in the Gaza Strip.<sup>7</sup>

A study released by Bisan Center for Research and Development in 2006<sup>8</sup> indicates that the scale of NGO service provision is largest in agriculture, followed by vocational training, and pre-school education followed by health. Within sectors, NGOs deliver specific services that are otherwise unavailable or inaccessible, and have developed therefore specific niches in areas of specialization.

NGOs also cover a wide range of activities including support to income generation projects, education services, specifically in informal education in addition to almost a quarter of pre-school education. The participation of women in vocational training programs offered by NGOs was notably higher than others. NGOs account for 23% of the total number of PHC centers in the West

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<sup>6</sup> Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Mapping Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Mapping Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2007

<sup>8</sup> The Role and Performance of Palestinian NGOs in Health, Education, and Agriculture, December 2006.

Bank and Gaza. Whereas UNRWA services are available to registered refugees, NGOs are heavily engaged in the provision of health education, rehabilitation and outreach programs to the rest of the population.<sup>9</sup> Out of a total of 77 hospitals in WBG, 40% are run by NGOs.

Moreover, civil society organizations and NGOs continue to support and maintain international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine, through advocacy as well as for their humanitarian and assistance initiatives; and the promotion, realization and respect of human rights. Civil society organizations continue to join and harmonize efforts at the local, national and international levels with respect to the legal obligations of governments to the question of Palestine.

#### **a. NDC Rapid Needs Assessment Findings**

On March 3 and 4, the NGO Development Center (NDC) conducted a rapid needs assessment in Gaza with approximately 50 Palestinian NGOs working in the sectors of Health and rehabilitation, Agriculture, Social Services and Education. It is important to note that this was the first needs assessment for and by local Palestinian NGOs. The methodology focused on sector working groups and included the following points of discussion: role of NGOs in service delivery, preparedness of NGOs in the current situation, capacity and capability of NGOs to absorb additional funding and to implement additional programs, the needs of each sector by priority, immediate and intermediate interventions with an emphasis on quick start, and the significance of cooperation and coordination.

#### ***Preliminary Findings***

The preliminary findings of this needs assessment indicated that Palestinian NGOs in Gaza face new and additional challenges as a result of Israel's military offensive. The vast majority of NGOs revealed that the unstable political situation, Israeli occupation and its manifestations continue to be the main detriment to their work. NGO participants stressed the need for continued advocacy initiatives on various tracks to end the Israeli occupation. NGOs also stressed the need for unity

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/index.html>

among Palestinian parties, coordination of efforts among all actors and the importance of finding exit strategies and working in the context of both immediate needs and long term development.

### **Roles (how and where do NGOs see their role)**

In response to the question on the role of local Palestinian NGOs, participants identified the following roles including: Empowering the Palestinian individual; Reviving the social fabric of the community; Continuation with the provision of quality services; Participation in planning for and implementation of reconstruction projects, coordination and cooperation with other actors, i.e., Palestinian Authority, related Palestinian Ministries, UN agencies and international NGOs, etc.; Developing immediate and long-term plans collectively; and human rights including advocacy and lobbying initiatives.

### **Challenges**

When asked about the challenges faced by NGOs, responses shifted from sector to sector, however, the overarching challenges are: The unstable political situation and fear in what the future might bring; The inability to reach 'target groups' to provide the needed services; Shifting organizational plans from development to relief; Increased demand and dependency on the NGO sector; Preparedness and capacity of organizations to respond to new and emerging challenges and needs; Increase in demand and shortage of supplies; and the shortage of funding.

### **Immediate and Long-term Needs as Identified by Sector**

During the two day workshop, NGOs discussed both immediate and long term needs by sector. It was noted that in addition to the immediate and long-term needs resulting from the latest Israeli actions, it was imperative to continue with on-going projects and programs in place. The needs identified by the four sector working groups, *include* the following:

#### **For HEALTH AND REHABILITATION, the immediate needs were:**

- Rehabilitation of health centers and facilities
- Provision of primary health care services; medical supplies and diagnostic equipment; and upgrading and improving intensive care units.

- Developing the capacities of health care personnel in the areas of preparedness and specialization.
  - Rehabilitation services for people with special needs and making available specialized aid equipment
- **On the longer run, NGOs focused more on the**
    - Development of a comprehensive health plan and the establishment of a comprehensive tracking system to document all activities in the health sector
- **For AGRICULTURE, the identified needs were:**
    - Rehabilitation and reconstruction of destroyed agricultural land, green houses; smallholder farms, irrigation networks and agricultural wells
    - Provision of agricultural input materials and assets including seedlings and trees,
    - Reconstruction of fishing boats and making available basic necessities for fishermen
    - Provision of micro-finance and loan programs for agricultural investment
- **The needs for EDUCATION included:**
    - Rebuilding and reconstruction of destroyed and damaged schools and universities;
    - Provision of assistance in tuition for all students
    - Making available basic education essentials such as, text books, school bags, uniform, desks and laboratories, etc...) and educational tools
    - Psycho-social programs for teachers, school administrators and students
    - Recreation/ extra-curricular activities for children.
- **The needs in the PSYCHO-SOCIAL sector were enormous; and the needs were categorized under three target groups (children, youth and women). In summary, the immediate needs were:**
    - Provision of psycho-social and counselling activities and programs, including recreational and venting out activities; support for counselling, social and legal



programs including professional therapeutic treatment and awareness activities on how to deal with children in times of crisis

- Developing the skills of the psycho-social and mental health workers
- Construction of safe playgrounds for children specifically in marginalized and densely populated areas
- Empowerment activities and skills development that lead to employment generation

**NDC will publish the full findings of the report including specific activities identified by sector in the coming weeks.**

#### **IV. Coordination**

Coordination among the PA, Palestinian NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and other actors is essential in realizing more efficient and effective intervention mechanisms, and to prevent duplication and redundancy in services. Palestinian NGOs remain the stabilizing force in the community and planning efforts have to be inclusive of NGOs including networks and unions that represent vast sectors of the local society.

It is important to note that coordination strategies, while addressing early recovery needs, should plan to exit dependency on humanitarian assistance, and to put in place the foundations for longer-term sustainable development in order to allow for economic and equitable growth in Palestine. Civil society and the NGO sector are key players in complementing the necessary responses.

#### **V. Conclusion**

We all remain concerned about the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli invasion which followed over eighteen months of an overpowering Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip during which all border crossings were closed and only an absolute minimum of humanitarian aid was allowed to pass into Gaza. As we all know, this led to severe shortage to all basic and essential supplies, including food, medicine and fuel, causing a dramatic rise in poverty, unemployment, hunger and disease. Basic services have to be restored immediately. It is imperative to embark without delay on the process of recovery and

reconstruction, both early and medium to longer-term, of the thousands of damaged homes, schools, hospitals and vital civilian infrastructure.

Yet, while we are heavily focusing on the needs in Gaza, we need to keep an open eye on what is happening in the West Bank including Jerusalem. Unprecedented actions towards house demolitions in East Jerusalem are taking place; East Jerusalem is completely isolated from the rest of the West Bank therefore imposing a rising economic crisis on the Jerusalemites who are left with no option but to leave. The West Bank is partitioned into zones and check points are continuously increasing; the annexation wall separates Palestinians from Palestinians, and settlements are expanding rapidly.

I will conclude this paper using some words from one of our donor partners, as identified in their cooperation strategy for the oPt "*Development and humanitarian assistance can only succeed in such a context if it is devised and implemented in close cooperation with political activities and interventions seeking to promote peace, respect for international humanitarian law and human rights standard. Without this interaction, development cooperation and humanitarian aid run the risk of serving as an excuse for the lack of political pressure on the part of the international community...*"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, COOPERATION STRATEGY (CS) 2006 – 2010 FOR THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT).