

Towards the Building of the Palestinian State: Key Issues for the International Development Cooperation

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1. Introduction

The cooperation of the international community with Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip) is an area of intervention very peculiar for the political implications that both underpin it and are raised by the cooperation itself.

The issue is not simply that of giving aid to needy groups of the Palestinian population, or to foster the process of development of targeted sectors of the Palestinian society. Nor the only determinants of the successful outcome of the process of cooperation are the goodwill, the ability and the professional approach of the donors and the local authorities (institutional and not institutional) that interact with the international community.

It is far too obvious that every prospect of development of the area rests on the outcome of the peace process. Unfortunately a great degree of uncertainty still is cast upon this outcome.

The result of the unstable environment in which the international cooperation operates is that even the best cooperation programmes, the ones that rely on well established connections with the recipients, the institutions and the civil society, based on the best sector strategies, that draw on outstanding human resources, risk not to be effective, their effectiveness being undermined by the instability of the peace process. The political system should therefore provide the essential precondition, that is to say the building of a consistent development process towards the constitution of a Palestinian state: political and institutional stability.

The Palestinian society is today divided between optimism and pessimism with respect to the result of the peace process. Yet the harsh political debate within the Palestinian society often distorts the meaning itself of optimism and pessimism that end up reflecting positions not seldom antithetical. To put it as Edward Said does (1999): "The conflict appears to be irresolvable as it is a dispute over a land between two folks that have always believed to have full right on it and that have always hoped that the counterpart, sooner or later, would have surrendered or left (...). Zionists within and out of Israel do not intend to give up the idea of a separated Jewish state; Palestinians believe the same thing, even though they have accepted far less than this at Oslo. Yet in both cases the idea of a state that belongs to "us" crashes with the reality: apart from the methods of ethnic cleansing and of "mass abduction" applied in 1948, Israel does not have other means of getting rid of the Palestinians, nor the Palestinians of getting rid of the Jewish. Neither of the two parts has any possibility of winning militarily over the other (...). The longer the current model of Israeli occupation and Palestinian neighbouring resistance will last, the harder will be reaching security for both the parts".

Though it is far too evident that, at stake being the life and the survival of millions of people, a firm and consistent effort should be made by the international community to resolve these problems so far unresolved.

Under this light we present our reasoning, obviously limited and incomplete, on development cooperation in Palestine. The first part is composed of a synthetic historical profile, some short accounts are given on the state of the peace process and an overview of the socioeconomic situation in West Bank and the Gaza Strip is offered. The second part briefly describes the effort of cooperation of the United Nations (UN), of the European Union and of the Italian government. In the third part, finally, some strategic and methodological indications for the cooperation in this area are put forward, stressing the role that international (European and Italian included) NGOs should play.

Only to contain the scope of the paper the relation mainly concentrates on the situation in West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without taking up the theme of Palestinian refugees.

From 1948-1949 onwards and from the first Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the Palestinians have known several waves of exile and have been hosted in many different lands. According to a census carried out by United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), by June the 30th, 1999 Palestinian refugees amounted to 3,6 millions. By December 1948 the United Nations (resolution of the Assembly N° 194) have acknowledged the right of the Palestinian refugees to go back home, reaffirming this right every year. Nevertheless, the Israeli government constantly rejects the concept of "right of return".

The issue of Palestinian refugees is among the knots that peace talks have still to undo. The destiny of these millions of people imposes that the international community does not forget about them, both committing to favouring a political solution that would make effective the United Nations resolution, and continuing in mobilising economic and material resources to improve the life conditions of the refugees' camps.

2. General overview

2.1 Brief historical outline

Palestine has been a province of the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century. It was limited in the North by Lebanon, in the north-east by Syria, in the east by Jordan, in the south by Egypt and in the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

At the end of the First World War, it was placed under the administration of the British people who promised its independence. At the same time, the Minister Balfour promised the European Zionists the creation of a "national Jewish homeland" in Palestine.

Following the reconstruction by Roblet (1999) and Said (1999) who represent the main sources we have drawn on herein, from 1921 onwards, Palestinian resistance organised itself, calling for independence and the stop to Jewish immigration, which intensified with the arrival of Hitler to power in Germany and the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe towards the end of the 1930s. This immigration benefited from a fund for the purchase of land; whereas the Palestinian sharecroppers were driven out. Immigrants cultivated the land and settled in villages previously built by Jewish people, manufactured their own weapons and set up their own militias.

At the end of the Second World War, it became completely impossible to slow down Jewish immigration. The British government handed over its mandate to the United Nations. After that, the General Assembly Resolution 181 called for the partition of the British-ruled Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Although the Jewish immigrants only represented one third of the population and occupied only 7% of Palestinian territory, they were allocated 56% of the land, in comparison to 44% for the Palestinian. The latter refused to accept this plan, for which, moreover, they had not been consulted.

The day that Ben Gurion declared the creation of the state of Israel (14 May 1948) a war of independence started along the borders of Palestine. Israel emerged victoriously, conquering the western part of Jerusalem and a major part of Palestinian territory. 385 Palestinian villages were destroyed and more than one million persons fled to surrounding countries. Israel thus held 78% of the Palestinian territory on which hardly 150,000 Palestinians remained. At the time of armistice in 1949, the unconquered territories of the West Bank and Gaza, were put respectively under Jordanian and Egyptian administration. Refugees were placed in camps which were managed by the UNRWA.

Following the rise of regional and international tensions, Israel started the 6-Day War in June 1967, during which it conquered Gaza, the West Bank (and East Jerusalem), the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai. In 1967 Israel dominated 100% of the territory of old Palestine. 1.4 millions Palestinians passed under Israeli military control, no longer having a motherland, to live in what was henceforth named the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

From 1967 onwards, the Palestinian Occupied Territories faced a wave of irreversible colonisation. Israeli migrants settled on the hills of the West Bank and Gaza. Everywhere in Israel and in the territories that were occupied since 1967, the Israeli authorities confiscated land belonging to the Palestinian people. Whole villages were destroyed, land was abandoned by refugees or expropriated from Israeli Arabs and confiscated in the territories for the installation of Israeli settlements.

In October 1973, the War of the Yom Kippur concluded with a new Israeli victory against the Arab countries.

The Camp David Agreements (1978) permitted the return of the Sinai to Egypt but nothing for Palestinian autonomy. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in June 1982, led to the death of thousands of Lebanese civilians, to the massacres in the camps of Sabra and Chatila and to the escape of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to Tunis.

1987 saw the uprising of the Palestinian youth. During the next four years, strikes, street battles and other events were organised, shops were closed or boycotted.

In 1988, the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, declared the independence of the Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories but nothing changed. Regional negotiations were started during the Gulf War. Israel agreed to meet its Arab neighbours in Madrid for the first time in October 1991. It was not until the "secret" negotiations of Oslo that a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians was begun.

Following a Declaration of Principle signed by the Israeli government and the PLO, finally recognised as a representative of the Palestinian Territories, "temporary agreements of self government" were signed in Washington in September 1993 under the aegis of the international community. The Declaration of Principle envisaged a gradual peace process. Before the final Statute of the territories was decided, a five year transition phase had to include two periods: Oslo I (Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho) and Oslo II (expansion of Palestinian autonomy and Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian cities). These measures were accompanied by various additional agreements on security, economic and regional cooperation.

The implementation of these principles was to be completely random and the agreements were not all the time respected. On the contrary, the settlements continued at an accelerated rate and Jerusalem became almost entirely encircled by Israeli constructions. Palestinian land continued to be confiscated everywhere for the construction of ring roads and water sources were always kept under the Israeli control. Israelis continued to control 70% of the West Bank and 40% of Gaza. In exchange for the autonomy left to part of Gaza, Jericho and 3% of the West Bank, the Israelis often continued closing the Autonomous Territories, plunging the Palestinian population into unprecedented levels of economic and commercial difficulty.

According to the Oslo Agreement, the West Bank was divided in three areas: zone A, administered only by Palestinians, apart from security, water, entrances and exits, zone B under the civil authority of Palestinians, but security, water, entrances and exits are totally controlled by Israel and the zone is constantly patrolled by Palestinian and Israel soldiers, zone C, entirely Israeli. According to the Oslo Agreement the three zones represent respectively about 3%, 27%, and 70% of the territory.

In October 1998, after 28 months of suspension of the peace process Arafat and Netanyahu sign an Agreement at Wye Plantation on Israeli withdrawal. The agreement also implies the transfer to zone A of 1% of zone C and 14.2% of zone B and the transfer to zone B of further 12% of zone C. In this way zone A would include 18.2% of the West Bank. However, entrance and exit control as well as security and water control still belong to Israel.

After the withdrawal from 2% of the West Bank the peace process is once again frozen in view of the political elections in Israel subsequently won by the labour candidate Ehud Barak.

On the 4th of September 1999 Arafat and Barak sign at Sharm-el-Sheik an agreement on the application of the Wye Plantation's Agreement. The agreement makes provision for the withdrawal in three phases of Israeli from the remaining 11% of the West Bank, to be completed by the 20th of

January 2000, the release of 350 Palestinian political prisoners, the building up of a new harbour at Gaza and of a corridor that links West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the restart of negotiations on the definitive statute of the Palestinian Territories, to be completed by the 13th of September 2000.

2.2 The peace process: state of the art and unsolved issues

It is worthwhile to mention the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as acknowledged by the international community (Barghouti: 1999):

- the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the occupied territories since 5th June 1967, including East Jerusalem, according to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338;
- the right to self determination and the establishment of the Palestinian state, according to UN General Assembly Resolution N° 181;
- the right of return for refugees, according to the Security Council Resolution N° 194;
- the dismantling of all Israeli settlements, which have been illegally built in the occupied Palestinian territory, according to the Security Council Resolution N° 465 and all other relevant resolutions.

Negotiations reached a deadlock, due to the refusal of Israel to recognise in full the above mentioned inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Under the present circumstances the prospect of the final status negotiations could not be the establishment of a viable, independent, sovereign state of Palestine. Some points still represent a very serious threat on this ongoing peace process.

One is the **issue of settlements**. Throughout the peace process and independently of the colour of its government, Israel has unfortunately continued its policy of colonising and controlling major parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Under the governments of Rabin, Peres, and later Netanyahu, expropriation of Palestinian land continued, Palestinian houses were destroyed, Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem lost their right to live in the city, new Jewish settlements in the West Bank were built and existing ones expanded. A network of by-pass roads was built to link settlements with each other and with Israel.

Since the signing of the Oslo Agreement, Israel confiscated approximately 6% of the total land of the West Bank. More than that, the settlement activities inside some areas like Jerusalem are very enhanced and since the signing of the Oslo process they have gone very far. The settlement activities in the Jerusalem area are changing the whole geopolitical nature of the West Bank since the size of Jerusalem according to the Israeli arrangements goes up to 25% of the total size of the West Bank.

Another very important issue that relates to settlement activities is the issue of the **geographical continuity** of the West Bank and Gaza. In fact, the geographical continuity is a very important factor for future viability of a Palestinian state.

In 1993, Israel decided to close off the communication of Palestinian areas with outside. The Gaza Strip was cut off from the West Bank, East Jerusalem was cut off from both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the northern part of the West Bank from its southern part. The closure remains in effect and it has fragmented Palestinian society politically, socially, economically, and culturally.

As a matter of fact, at the moment in the Gaza Strip, the size of which does not exceed 400 km², there are one million Palestinians allowed to live only on 60% of that little piece of land, while 5,000 settlers are consuming about 40% of the size of Gaza and are controlling more than 50% of water resources. On the other hand the separation of areas from each other in the West Bank is going on.

All the new redeployment maps show that for each step of redeployment there is a consolidation of bantustanisation of the West Bank, separating the Palestinian territories from each other with settlements and settlement roads and transforming the country by junks of bantustans separated from each other.

Not only that, the most recent achievement - which is the safe passage between West Bank and Gaza - can hardly be called a "safe passage". As a matter of fact it is to a large extent an unsafe process for people to cross. The Palestinians in Gaza who have to cross from Gaza to the West Bank have to spend no less than 4 to 6 hours waiting at the check points and they have to be checked thoroughly to be able to use this passage. The more important thing is that it is up to the government and the Israeli authorities to decide whom from the Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank have the right to cross to the other side. And what it comes out is strictly Israeli's regulations that control this passage.

Other unsolved issues are the ones of **Jerusalem, refugees** and **final borders** of the Palestinian state, whose talks about, in the intention of Israel, should be postponed.

In summary, the crucial point which concerns the political process is the declared 4 "NO's" by Mr Barak regarding the future solution about the Palestinian question: no return to the borders of 1967; no return of the Palestinian refugees; no dismantling of the Jewish settlements; no division of Jerusalem.

If this Israeli strategy is implemented, the Palestinian state could result as an entity that does not have control over its borders, does not have control over its airport as the case is now, it will not have the control of who goes in and who goes out from its port which is being opened and basically Israel would determine who of the Palestinians is allowed to become a citizen of this state.

The Palestinians demand to have a Palestinian state in the area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip within the boundaries of 1967; yet with the existing arrangements Palestinians will not be able to exercise this right and have a viable state. Not only that, the latest Israeli propositions do not provide for giving the Palestinians the full jurisdiction on the water resources in the areas that are transferred to their control.

2.3 Socioeconomic situation

In a comparison of selected development indicators, the Palestinian Territories score relatively well compared to many developing countries. Nonetheless, a comparison with neighbouring countries is quite significant:

Table 1 - West Bank, Gaza Strip and neighbouring countries: selected development indicators

Indicators (1996)	West Bank and Gaza Strip	Israel	Jordan	Egypt
Population	2,38	5,00	5,10	60,90
GNP per capita/year	1.726,00	14.530,00	1.440,00	720,00
Life expectancy	71,70	77,20	68,50	64,30
Fertility rate	6,70	2,90	5,50	3,50
IMR	28,00	7,80	33,00	63,00
U5MR	36,00	9,00	25,00	51,00

Source: MAE-DGCS (1999) and UNSCO (1999)

However, the socioeconomic situation in the Palestinian Territories is strongly conditioned by the difficulties inherent in the peace process. In the following pages we present an updated description of this situation (MAE-DGCS: 1999 and UNSCO: 1999).

2.3.1 Economy and employment

Israeli occupation, the separation between West Bank and Gaza and the heavy closures policy implemented by the Israeli government have seriously hit the Palestinian economy from 1993 onwards. In 1996 per capita GDP in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that in 1992 was US\$ 2,700 has drop to 1,700 US\$. In 1997 and in 1998 when the number of closures declined the macroeconomic performance of the economy has slightly improved, but serious economic problems still exist.

The promotion of public and private investments heavily rely on the freedom of the passage of goods between Palestinian Territories and Israel. The limits imposed to this freedom by the policy of closures and restrictions to the passage of goods through the customs has jeopardised the prospects of growth limiting the scope for investments. Hence the engine of the economy has stopped, domestic production has slowed down causing an increase in the rate of unemployment (today's actual rate of unemployment amounts to 24.7%) and badly reducing the capacity of households' expenditures.

The main result of the economic crisis that the Israeli occupation has brought about has been an increase in the rate of poverty. According to a recent survey by the Palestinian Ministry of Planning and Cooperation (Mopic) 30.3% of the households live on an income which is below the poverty line (650 US\$ per capita at the end of 1995). In the Gaza Strip the rate of poverty is 40.4%, in West Bank 11.1%.

In 1997 the composition of the Palestinian GDP by sector (according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, PCBS) was the following: 13.9% agriculture and fishing, 13.8% manufacturing and mining, 8.2% construction, 64.1% services. Per capita income in 1998 was 1,387 US\$ (18,000 US\$ in Israel).

2.3.2 Palestinian youth

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip children under 15 number 1.2 millions out of a total population of 2.38 millions. The youth population places a high demand on health, education, and social welfare sectors; at the same time the economic and social infrastructure must accommodate their future entry into the labour market.

The closure policy has brought a peculiar phenomenon: a labour force participation rate among children aged 12 to 16 of 11.5%, corresponding to the level of that of adult women. This is due to the fact that boys under the age of 16 do not need a permit to enter Israel and work, for they are not requested to carry an identity card, while adult are. Yet to help their families children drop out of school. This implies that the future Palestinian labour force will be less educated badly damaging the perspective of growth of the economy.

2.3.3 Disparities by locale

Different areas and types of locale in the West Bank and Gaza Strip show great disparities in health and education services. In turn, these inequalities generate a great variability in a number of indicators. The infant mortality rate (IMR) is estimated at 28‰ and underfive mortality (U5MR) at 36‰. The Gaza Strip has a higher IMR (32‰) and U5MR (41‰) than the West Bank (25‰ and 32‰ respectively). A further disparity can be observed between rural villages on one side and towns and refugee camps on the other side. In fact villages have shown higher average IMRs and U5MRs when compared to towns and camps, due in part to UNRWA's provision of health services in the camps. This difference can be partly explained by the fact that villages have traditionally had less adequate school and health facilities than other locales, and inadequate or no electricity at all, piped water and waste disposal systems. Nonetheless, in the Gaza Strip poverty has slashed a large share of urban population too.

2.3.4 Palestinian women

A further of inequality in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank refers to gender. Women tend to marry very young, to have their first child soon after the marriage and to be busy in domestic duties, without participating in the labour force. United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 37% of Palestinian women marry, and 16% deliver their first child, aged less than 17 years of age. This happens even if the knowledge of family planning is widespread. 99.3% of women state they are familiar with most methods of contraception, 50.7% in the West Bank and 33.9% in the Gaza Strip currently use contraception, but only one third of these uses 'modern' methods. This kind of gender

disparity poses a great risk on women health. According to UNICEF the maternal mortality rate is at 70-80‰ and anaemia is high, with a greater incidence among pregnant women.

Gender discrimination starts on school desks to continue in the labour market. Women are less educated than men (the female illiteracy rate in the West Bank is 32% and in Gaza 27%, compared with 8% and 21% for males respectively). This makes less attractive their employment, unless in low skilled positions: women's participation in the labour force is concentrated in agriculture (33%), the service sector (22%), and manufacturing (14%), the sectors with the lowest average daily wages. The female participation in the labour force was 12% in 1996, compared with 72% for men. While the number of employed women rose substantially during the period of the closure, it dropped again once employment opportunities for men improved.

2.3.5 Education

The rate of literacy is around 84%, with an average of 77% for women and 91.5% for men. The education system is managed either by UNRWA (250 schools in the refugee camps and in the rural villages, 14% of the total), or NGOs (13%) or the Palestinian Authority (public schools, 73% of the total, were managed by the Israeli authorities. By 1994 their management was handed over to the Palestinian Ministry). Many schools need some sort of restoring work, lacking in many cases water, electricity and latrines.

Also the programmes followed in the different areas vary greatly. In the West Bank Jordanian programmes are adopted. In the Gaza Strip the Egyptian model is followed: the Ministry of Education, financially supported by Italian Cooperation, has developed a national School Programme that has already been approved by the Palestinian Legislative Committee.

2.3.6 Health

A number of institutions concur in providing health services. The supply is shared among the Palestinian Public Health System¹ and by UNRWA, but also by many NGOs, other associations and by private bodies that provide both basic assistance and hospital services both using their own infrastructures and public structures under contract. The public sector manages 205 infrastructures for basic health assistance, 41 are managed by UNRWA and 192 by Palestinian NGOs. In the West Bank there are 15 hospitals working, 9 of which are public, the other 6 being managed by NGOs. In the Gaza Strip there are 5 hospitals, 4 of them public, 1 managed by an NGO. A new hospital should be built by UNRWA with the financial assistance of the European Union, but the delivery of the work is continuously put off by the National Palestinian Authority (NPA).

The health conditions of the population are not bad if compared to those of countries of a similar socio/economic development level. The infant mortality rate has been dropping continuously in the recent past, from 40-45‰ (1993) , to 28‰ (according to the most recent estimates from the PCBS), with an average child (under 5) mortality rate of 36‰. Average life expectancy is at 71.7 years, higher than in neighbouring Arab countries although lower than Israel. The estimated growth rate of the population is 5.8% in the West Bank and 6.3% in the Gaza Strip; fertility rates are high at 6.7%.

Moreover, we have to consider that the main causes of mortality of children under 5 years of age are the road and domestic accidents (20.9%), acute respiratory infections (18.7%), congenital anomalies (11.8%) and diarrhoea (10%). Instead, the main causes of mortality of children under 1 years of age are the congenital abnormalities (15.7%), ARI/pneumonia (15.7%) and prematurity (13.9%).

On the whole the access to services is relatively good. 84.1% of households have piped water supply, yet only 57% of rural communities have 24-hour electricity, and only 35% of all households are attached to piped sewage networks. Accessibility of health services is satisfying (49.1% of the

¹ This has taken over the Israeli civil administration in 1994.

population live within 5 kms of a hospital and only 8.1% live further than 5 kms from a doctor), but there is a major problem still unresolved that is the overcrowding (43% of all households have seven or more people per room). Overcrowding is the main cause of health problems such as skin and respiratory infections.

Also worth of attention is the fact that a mix of diseases associated with more affluent societies such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular ailments coexist with forms of malnutrition such as Protein-Energy Malnutrition (PEM) and micronutrient deficiencies such as anaemia.

3. Development priorities and external aid

It is shown hereinafter a specific sectorial assessment of the basic needs and priorities for the Palestinian Authority's development (UNSCO: 1999).

3.1 Needs and priorities: a sector specific assessment

3.1.1 Education

As children under 15 number 1.2 millions out of a total population of 2.38 millions, the education sector is a vitally important component in any future development plans. This is also the reason why education, which employs about 22,000 people, is the most relevant among the public sectors managed by the Palestinian Authority.

Immediate priorities in this sector are the upgrading of infrastructures and a revitalization of human resources.

Comprehensive efforts to relieve the overcrowding, to increase the number of schools, which is currently inadequate and to rehabilitate the deteriorated premises are continuing.

Capacity development at the classroom level is also urgently needed in order to revitalize an educational process which has suffered from low teacher morale and lack of institutional support. The framework for such efforts must be a comprehensive institutional development process targeting the educational system overall, its policy making and implementation procedures at every level. Given the impact of education on long term development, the sectorial priority is to support the Palestinian Authority's implementation of its National Programme of Action for Children, in which the formal, non-formal and primary education fields are targeted for improvement in quality, access and management. Achievement of these goals requires the following:

- technical and financial assistance to the Ministries of Education and Higher Education to continue the enhancement of skills - at the policy planning level and in the classroom - and improvements in equipment and infrastructure;
- advocacy and training aimed at raising awareness of discrimination based on gender or disability, in order to redress disparity in the system and facilitate greater participation by girls and to encourage education tailored for students with special needs;
- promotion of the concept of an integrated school/community approach to children's education and acquisition of life skills.

3.1.2 Labour market

The problems for the Palestinian economy have really started with the Gulf War, where the two main sources of income have been jeopardised: job opportunities in Israeli territory (well available as Palestinian labour is quite cheap) and remittances from labourers employed in Gulf states. After the beginning of the Gulf War a dramatic fall in remittances has occurred and the establishment of a permit system for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to work inside Israel has lowered the number of Palestinians working in Israel from a pre-war estimated monthly average of 180,000 to 116,000 in 1992, in 1993 it went down to 65/83,000 and to of 22,250 in 1996.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the steady rate of growth of Palestinian population implies there is a net inflow of Palestinians into the labour force of 16,000 units

every year. To employ these newcomers and the number of unemployed and underemployed 30,000 to 40,000 new jobs should be created each year. It is quite unlikely that the Palestinian economy will be able to absorb the increasing labour supply within the next years (as the labour force is currently expected to grow by 8% annually and the medium age of the population under 15 years old is very high). In the long term, at the household level, most Palestinian breadwinners will have thus to support large and extended families.

As a consequence, the employment problem needs both the provision of short term job opportunities, and the formulation of long term strategies to expand the labour demand.

Moreover, the workers that have lost their jobs in Israel need to be employed. In order to alleviate the economic and psychosocial effects that frictional unemployment brings up, short term work opportunities must be provided. In the long term the objective has to be the promotion of investments in the primary sector (that represents one third of GDP) and a different preparation of the labour force. All this has to be integrated by a strengthening of the regulatory and legal framework.

3.1.3 Governance and public administration

The Palestinian Authority, after taking up the responsibility, has made substantial improvements in institution building efforts in the area of public administration at central and local levels.

In the initial phase, the Palestinian Authority has been helped by the donors that have supported investment and the recurrent costs of the start up phase. The financial support have been coupled with consultant and technical assistance activities. At the beginning, the external aid has been also targeted to foster the entry in the public administration of personnel from different entities, such as the Israeli administration, the PLO, NGOs.

The final aim of good governance efficient public administration and efficient provision of public goods have to be pursued. It is not possible doing this without technical assistance to the public sector. The best result would be that of replicating at governmental level the good governance experience at local level that local authorities and NGOs have proved.

At all levels, ensuring financial accountability and operational transparency of ministries, councils and organisations is key to continued international participation in the development process. An overall sustainable development cannot be built in the absence of good governance, a political environment of cooperation, and dialogue.

The key objectives are then: internal strengthening; specification of the roles and responsibilities of the various ministries; clarification of the mandates of the different branches of government; strengthening of the Palestinian sense of 'ownership' of the public sector and local governance structures. The Palestinian Authority needs substantial support to accomplish all these goals.

3.1.4 Health

The improvement of the health conditions of the Palestinian populations is mainly due to the work done by the NGO sector at Primary Health Care (PHC) level and by the extraordinary effort made by UNRWA in favour of the refugees over almost 50 years. Nonetheless, these efforts have not been the development of a modern health system.

In 1994 the newly created Ministry of Health of the Palestinian Authority (PA) inherited a strongly neglected and inefficient system. Health institutions, buildings and medical equipment over the years of occupation had often received less than minimal maintenance while they needed deep restoration and improvements in order to respond nowadays to the needs of a continuously growing population. The bad conditions of the structures have been still affecting the efficiency and the sustainability of the Palestinian health system, which lacks of both economic and management rational

criteria. As in the past, resources have been constantly misallocated. An example is given by the development of a relatively large number of hospitals, all with less than 100 beds, often in the same locale, provided with ancillary services (laboratories, x-rays service, etc) in response to a greater demand of primary health care services that could have been better met at PHC level. The building of relatively small hospitals has required the duplication of investments. Economies of scale, that is savings in technology costs and human resources, could have been exploited by a rationalisation of economic resources.

Today only 20 to 30% of expenditures are directed to PHC and public health, and the rest to secondary and tertiary care. The solution to these structural problems has required both commitment and external aid to improve PHC infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank through new investments to expand and equip hospitals.

The decline in economic conditions has forced the Ministry of Health in recent months to undertake measures to limit the rapidly growing public expenditures on health which are the result of: an expanding base of those covered by insurance (largely due to the increase in public sector workers and police); the large number of families on the social security net who receive virtually free health care; and increasing expenditures on drugs, disposable and laboratory and radiological supplies.

The priorities to which the PA Ministry of Health is already committed are: reforming the health system; reviewing the existing body of health legislation; strengthening primary health care; providing limited administrative and financial decentralisation to key relevant institutions.

3.1.5 Infrastructure and housing

The increasing demand for decent infrastructure has never been met for years, irrespectively of the sector (housing, transportation, water and electricity supply) owing to a constant underfunding of infrastructure that have gone decaying continuously. The development of modern infrastructures is therefore one of the key issues for the Palestinian Authority to face.

The housing market feels the effects of restrictions in zoning, planning and building permits. Due to the lack of investments and to the particular financial mechanisms, most of the houses were built almost completely on an autonomous basis and over a long time.

Electricity is supplied by the Israeli Electricity Company. 98% of the households are supplied with electricity, but over 130 villages in the West Bank still have either no electricity at all, or are supplied for only a few hours every day. The supply for both residential and industrial use has not increased in response to the needs of a growing population. The supply and management of water resources and waste water remains a key priority.

The Israeli civil administration has always had clear the strategic importance of water for the Palestinian society and has soon taken the control over the water resources and electricity of the Territories entrusting their distribution and tariff-related issue to Israeli companies. Furthermore, even though the Palestinians paid the most expensive tariffs, Israeli agencies used the cutting off of supplies under request of the Israeli authority as a means of disciplining a recalcitrant village or an area prey to political agitation. Both the agriculture production of the Palestinians and the availability of the drinking water available for the growing Palestinian population were seriously undermined by this policy of price discrimination and sudden interruption of provision.

The water and waste water management and the responsibility for the coordination of related activities have been taken up in 1995 by the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA). However, due to the absence of any substantive development in the water and sewage sector previously, much remains to be done. Only 29% of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are connected to a public sewage system, and raw sewage continues to be diverted into cesspits, posing an environmental hazard to the underground water points, which are the main water resource. Long term planning is currently under way and sewage treatment plants are being overhauled on an individual basis. However, the

rehabilitation process is lengthy, given the immediate environmental and health hazards. In addition, insufficient facilities for solid waste disposal or irregular collection in many areas compounds the problem.

Transportation needs also remain unmet in certain areas with 40% of the existing road network requires urgent repairs, and the entire road system needs to be reworked in order to better facilitate development and expansion of commerce in Palestinian communities.

3.1.6 Enterprises

Private investments (mostly concentrated in housing construction and agriculture) have been considerably harmed by the great uncertainty and sense of insecurity cast upon the Palestinian economy by the closure and restrictions policies in the Territories and the consequent difficulties in getting access to markets and items. It is absolutely necessary to create a legal framework for the support to the private sector as well as to improve a banking system able to offer adequate financial services to the investors.

The Palestinian Authority, recognizing that private sector activity must be stimulated if the economy of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is to become more stable and independent in the future, has highlighted the tourism as another area ripe for development and income generation.

The establishment of export-oriented industrial areas, largely with investment from abroad, is another key objective of the Palestinian Authority. These projects are intended not only to create employment, but also to make Palestinian industry able to directly produce goods instead of simply acting as "contractors" for Israeli enterprises.

3.1.7 Rule of law sector

At the moment of its setting-up, the Palestinian Authority was faced to a neglected legal situation characterised by the overlay of military and civil law systems; a lack of regulatory frameworks for both private and public sector; and the need to promote the protection of human rights as well as to support the building of a democratic society.

The creation of a strong, effective and modern Palestinian legal framework is vital to the advancement of the development effort.

The Palestinian Authority has identified a number of sectorial priorities, among which there is the reform of the legal system in accordance with international standards. A joint effort among the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council, municipal authorities and non governmental organisations is currently made together with United Nations agencies and numerous international donors to fulfil the mentioned objectives.

Other priority needs are the promotion of the independent administration of justice and the enhancement of a legal environment able to support both the private sector investment (specifically land registration, building and property ownership, planning and zoning regulations) and the public sector (specifically taxation and banking laws, labour laws and workers' rights, environmental protection).

3.2 The role of the United Nations

The United Nations have played a multifarious role in the region, where they have been acting through UNRWS since 1950. For almost 50 years UNRWA has been provided for health and social assistance in favour of Palestinian refugees. In 1980 also UNDP began to act in the region by providing technical assistance and support for the improvement of the infrastructures.

The action of the United Nations in the area is part of a major international cooperation process, which was started after the Oslo Agreements signed in September 1993. A highly qualified task force was appointed to carry out an overall analysis for assessing needs and priorities. This task force pointed out the importance of sustaining the setting up of new projects whose benefits would

have immediate impact on the improvement of social well being while continuing the financing of ongoing projects.

In October 1993 the first donor conference for the support of the peace process in the Middle East earmarked 2,4 US\$ billions for the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian Territories. In 1994 the United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) was created with the mandate of coordinating all the UN activities. The Special Coordinator interacts with the Palestinian Authority and the World Bank and represents the United Nations on the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), which was established to monitor the decisions undertaken in the framework of the donor conferences. In addition, UNSCO has developed the mechanisms for coordinating the aid that the donors at the Washington conference (1993) decided to grant. The mechanisms, bringing together the Palestinian Authority, donors, the World Bank and the United Nations are the following (UNSCO: 1999):

- the Local Aid Coordination Committee (LACC), providing a forum on the ground for discussing the main priorities and challenges to the development effort, and including representatives from the Palestinian Authority and all locally represented donors, including Israel;
- the Joint Liaison Committee (JLC), a forum in which economic policy matters related to donor assistance are discussed;
- Sector Working Groups (SWGs), 11 sector specific committees which facilitate communication and coordination between donors to particular sectors, specialised United Nations agencies and the relevant Palestinian Authority agency.

The growing weight of the UN role in the Palestinian Territories can be better understood considering the number of agencies working in the area increased from 3 in 1993 to more than 25 agencies² in 1997, which in 1996 managed funds for an amount of about 254 US\$ millions.

The key areas which represent the main areas of concern in the Palestinian development agenda and are addressed by funds disbursed through UN are: investment in physical infrastructure; support for private sector-led development; capacity development, particularly in the public sector; support to the social welfare sector.

3.3. The European Union Cooperation

Alongside political commitment to establishing and safeguarding peace and stability, the European Union has made the provision of financial support to encourage economies capable of producing sustainable growth a major cornerstone of its policy in the drive to secure peace in the Middle East.

The European Council's 1989 Strasbourg Declaration confirmed Member States' willingness to see the EU take an increasingly active role in the region, focusing on the following priority areas for support: a) small scale employment generating projects; b) measures in the agricultural and industrial sectors, giving priority to those which support increased food self-sufficiency; c) education and training, particularly in vocational and technical fields; d) the upgrading of Palestinian institutions and professional organisations.

The European Union is the biggest donor for reconstruction of the Palestinian Territories. In November 1993, it was decided to allocate 500 ECUs³ millions in aid for the period 1994-1998. The European Union has pledged 50 ECUs millions in grants each year, while the others will be given as a long term loan from the European Investment Bank.

² 15 of whom operate in the field through their offices.

³ ECU (European Currency Unit) was introduced in 1979 when the European Monetary System was created. ECU's rate was based on a basket of fixed quantities from the participant currencies. It was replaced in 1999 by Euro, which will be coined and used by all the citizens of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) Member States in replacement of the single state currencies. Euro has replaced ECU on a one-to-one basis.

The EU aid to Palestinians can be articulated into five main sectors: 1) aid to refugees through UNRWA; 2) aid through cofinancing with European NGOs; 3) Direct Aid Programme to the Palestinian population living in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. That includes exceptional aid packages provided by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO); 4) aid through Mediterranean NetWorks such as Med Urbs, Med Media and Med Campus linking Palestinians to EU member states and Mediterranean partner countries; 5) loans available from the European Investment Bank.

In this framework, the role of the European NGOs is channelled mainly through the implementation of cofinanced development projects by a specific budget line and the humanitarian/emergency projects financed by ECHO.

During the period 1979-1997, 254 projects have been implemented by the European NGOs⁴. The total resource allocation has raised to 60 ECUs millions, of which 20 have been given by the European Union. The actions have been focused on health, education, training, gender, agriculture and human rights sectors.

Over the period 1993-1999 ECHO⁵ allocated more than 60 Euros millions, 46 of which were in favour of the Palestinian Territories and 14 in support of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The most part of such money has been spent through European NGOs, above all French and Italian ones. Some projects have been implemented also through international organisations such as UNRWA, UNICEF and WHO.

ECHO aid has mainly been focused on the health sector through the provision of medicines, equipment, consumables and materials, rehabilitation of health facilities, and human resources training. Food aid, education, housing and sanitation have been other important sectors provided.

The effects of all such exceptional financial and material aid the European Union provides to uphold the development of the Palestinian society could be seriously hampered if not supported by a stronger political action, which should play a fundamental role in assisting the peace process. Such political role should be a priority for the European Union also in order to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process launched at the Barcelona Conference in 1995. Stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean area cannot be conceived and pursued without a concrete and strong political commitment for fair and lasting peace.

In this sense, an important sign was the appointing of an EU Special Envoy in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in some cases the EU credibility is threatened when it doesn't react to well-known violations of international treaties in prejudice of the weak Palestinian economy and of the EU itself. It is the case of the EU commercial Agreements with Israel, which since almost two years has been benefiting from unilateral privileges granted to its export towards the European Union. Yet, even though only the goods produced in Israel are considered by the commercial agreements between this country and the EU, Israel constantly labels as Israeli goods that are produced in the Territories occupied since 1967 and in the Palestinians settlements that are excluded from commercial privileges.

3.4 Italian Cooperation

Italian Cooperation in the Palestinian Territories has been particularly active dating back to more than ten years ago (MAE-DGCS: 1999). Italy has always been amongst the most munificent donors, especially in the last 5 years when, following the resolutions of the Oslo Agreement it has increased the financial support towards this area to 80 US\$ millions between 1994 and 1998. The

⁴ English, Italian, French and Belgian NGOs are the most active on the ground.

⁵ Considering that we should highlight that ECHO was established only in 1992.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995 and PLO signed an agreement in which a cooperation programme was outlined for the period 1994-1995. In this agreement the following crucial sectors were established: health; public education; vocational training; water resources; agricultural development; the support to small and medium enterprises; urgent interventions to meet the dramatic nutritional needs of the population and to improve the efficiency of the Palestinian administration.

A new element was introduced by this programme, that is the presence of a Palestinian institution, the National Palestinian Authority, as a counterpart in the negotiations. The peace process has built a new social situation that has favoured the process of aggregation of the various Palestinian Institutions. This process has also brought about evidence of the need of training cadres capable of managing different services. There should not be forgotten the strong difficulties that the Cooperation has been facing due to the peace process, the power takeover and the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, as well as the economic relations with Israel. In this context, the actions are marked by a high level of flexibility and urgency.

At the Ministerial Conference on assistance to the Palestinian Territories - which was held in Paris in 1996 - Italy committed itself to finance development projects to the tune of 25 US\$ millions. Though recognizing the importance of infrastructure enhancement, Italian Cooperation deemed it useful to include components of technical assistance, institution building and social development in its interventions. Thanks to the entry into force of law 558 of October 23, 1996, the possibility was envisaged to grant soft loans to the Palestinian Authority and a first commitment was undertaken in May 1997 for a total amount of 60 US\$ millions.

On the occasion of the bilateral talks held in Rome on June 12, 1998, Italy committed itself to fund a package of initiatives to the tune of 18.4 US\$ millions, which regards interventions in the mentioned sectors, thus strengthening the strategies already pursued.

Italy also financed an integrated plan of measures for the Bethlehem district in view of the Holy Year in the framework of the *ad hoc* coordination structure created to this end - known as "Bethlehem 2000"- and committed itself to fund a package of measures for a total amount of 2.5 US\$ millions.

Following upon the Wye Plantation Peace Agreements of October 23, 1998, at the Conference held in Washington on November 1998 an aid programme was launched as a follow-up to those undertaken for the previous five year period. On that occasion, Italy committed itself to fund bilateral projects under the form of grants to the tune of 40 US\$ millions for the three year period 1999-2001.

4. Strategic and methodological issues for further cooperation

4.1 Aid to Palestinians: a twofold approach

The international aid to Palestinians should be twofold: humanitarian aid and emergency on one side and development programmes as well as institution building and social tissue on the other side.

4.1.1 Emergency and humanitarian aid

The emergency situation developed in the last years is not over: needs for emergency are still a lot.

In the Palestinian framework, marked by a muddled social growing that adopts as a model the patterns of market economy without having the tools and infrastructures pertaining to a modern social state, the humanitarian aid has to be conceived in benefit of the weakest social groups that are in

danger of being excluded from the economic development and from the access to the basic services like health and education.

As far as the health assistance and education are concerned the risk exists that, due to the scarcity of the available resources, the public sector is not in the possibility of providing decent services accessible by poor population. Furthermore, this situation could also provoke the creation of a "parallel" market providing private services of good quality for the more fortunate social groups.

Therefore, the emergency humanitarian aid has to be aimed at protecting the most vulnerable population, at reducing the social marginalisation of an increasing number of Palestinian families, at improving the economic situation and facilitating the access to good quality welfare services for the less fortunate social groups. Than it follows that the emergency humanitarian aid must encompass as well conceptions of rehabilitation and development.

When considering the health sector it is well and immediately evident its scarce efficiency in terms costs-benefits in one hand and its scarce resources in the other hand. In this context, providing goods and means without keeping into account the structural necessity may turn to be of scarce utility, even harmful. Therefore, the humanitarian initiatives in Palestine may be conceived endowed with functions and components aimed at intervening on the structural problems of the targeted health institutions.

An emergency humanitarian initiative in the social-health sector will have as priority target the most vulnerable social groups and, meanwhile, it will aim, through the provided goods and means, at priming processes of structural improvement. The support foreseen for social and health facilities must be clearly aimed not only at satisfying immediate needs but mainly supporting the concerned structures when carrying out their more general functions.

This objective may be achieved in different ways: for instance, by planning the purchase of goods and services to the process of structural adjustment of the targeted institution; by combining training initiatives to the donated goods; by providing goods earmarked not only for critical and emergency situations but as well suitable for improving the ordinary health and social assistance.

4.1.2 Rehabilitation and development programmes: the role of EU and NGOs

At the same time it is necessary to give more impulse to **middle and long term rehabilitation and development programmes**.

In this context, it is essential to continue to strengthen and possibly increase development programmes aimed to reinforce the ongoing development processes in the Palestinian society, in several crucial sectors: income and employment generating activities; human resources development and training; environment protection; infrastructures; health and social issues; education; support for local organisations for civil rights; institution building.

Political back up and actions from European Union and member states are nevertheless requested to give more impact to such kind of projects. The impact of humanitarian as development projects in Palestine is currently heavily threatened by the weakness of the peace process. Cooperation projects risk being almost useless in presence of a lack of the political conditions that should permit to consolidate any kind of development process.

4.2 The role of the NGOs

4.2.1 NGOs and the civil society

The international NGOs can play a significant political role in the Palestinian society, concretely contributing, among other commitments, to the growth of a Palestinian democratic and civil society.

The Palestinian society is a fruitful land. There are so many initiatives, grassroots associations, local groups, local NGOs in all spheres of the civil life. Many of these are valid and are expression of the Palestinian people and civil society. However, it should be noted the presence of less organised

organisations and the existence of others that are just the screens of interests and goals that have nothing to do with the real needs of the majority of the population.

A lasting, consistent and rooted presence of international NGOs can contribute to stimulate a process of strengthening and empowerment of the best structured Palestinian NGOs.

International NGOs, when they maintain an active neutral position in favour of the vulnerable groups without supporting any local political group, can play an important role for strengthening the operational relations among Palestinians NGOs and for supporting their dialogue and coordination with the Palestinian Authority. In this moment of organisation of a new Palestinian state, the contribution and the collaboration of all valid actors are needed as much as ever. Therefore, the European Union and the international community should favour strongly such integration and cooperation.

4.2.2 European NGOs and the Mediterranean integration of the Middle East

As far as the European NGOs are concerned, their work represents a fundamental contribution to encourage the dialogue and the meeting among people in the Mediterranean area. Keeping alive in Europe the awareness of the ongoing tragedy in the Middle East is essential to the peace process and to the Mediterranean integration process too.

4.2.3 Why rely on NGOs?

The role of European NGOs must not be limited to humanitarian and emergency operations. Their increasing involvement in development programmes could empower their role of democratic and civil promotion. In fact, international NGOs, thanks to their rooting on the field and their direct relationships with the recipients, can give an important contribution to the development process in the Palestinian society.

There are practical reasons for which donors should more rely on NGOs to implement cooperation programmes: organisations of that kind are non-profit, can mobilise high qualified and technical resources from their countries, can promote the participation of European qualified institutions as municipalities, local administrations, etc.

In other words, in most of the sectors for which cooperation is needed in Palestine, European NGOs can provide qualified technical expertise and at the same time can guarantee a sound relationship with the local civil society.

4.3 Final remarks

In Palestine as in many other countries where NGOs operate, the everyday struggle for the life of millions of people often is originated by political crisis.

In the context of the international donors community, international NGOs can give a concrete contribution also in assessing development policies.

Therefore, the answers needed are manifold: material aid, humanitarian aid, economical aid, social aid, but also the practice of sound political strategies. Such kind of strategies are often the keystone to change the life of millions of people and to give more effect to the efforts made by the international community.

Yet, the European and international NGOs cannot be reduced to solely implementing agency of cooperation programmes. Many among them have proven to be able to give a significant contribution to the definition of sound political strategies in a continuous dialogue with donors and other important actors.

Humanitarian, rehabilitation and development projects should be conceived in a well-defined short, middle and long term strategy to the elaboration of which the dialogue between EU, member states government and NGOs is essential.

It is also to facilitate such a dialogue that the European NGOs organised themselves in national platforms and in the European Coordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP). Such instruments facilitate the implementation of national and European wide information campaigns

about the Palestinian situation, as well as the participation in tables of discussion with national government and with the European Commission on methods and strategies of cooperation with Palestinians.

In this framework, a concrete proposal is the set up of a permanent discussion table with all the main Italian actors involved in development cooperation with Palestinians: DGCS, NGOs, associations, local administrations, universities and research centres.

This panel should be the floor for discussing strategies, methods, programmes and to coordinate the solidarity and development effort of national and local administrations and of the Italian civil society and therefore to make it more effective.

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Rome, 23 may 2000*

Towards the Building of the Palestinian State: Key Issues for the International Cooperation

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