



THE NGOS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

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Summer School on the Social and Economics Aspects of the Middle East Peace Process

Seminar on the NGOs' Contribution to the Peace Process

Molfetta (Bari), August 30th – Sept. 8th 1999

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Introduction

First of all I want to thank the organizers for inviting me to give this lessons at this important course and to thank all of you in advance for the patience and courtesy with whom you will follow my lecture.

Before to start, a couple of words about who I am and where I am from. I'm from an Italian NGO Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP) based in Rome and working in the international cooperation field since more than 16 years (since 1983). We carry out development, humanitarian and emergency/relief programs in almost 20 different countries in Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Asia and Eastern Europe. Our work embraces a wide range of sectors such as health and social development; rural development, food security and poverty alleviation, education and training, natural resources and environment management. Within the field of emergency and humanitarian aid, special attention is given to: refugee communities, returnees and displaced people, health services, disaster preparedness, reactivation and reconstruction after natural catastrophes or conflicts. Since various years our Ngo is working in favour of Palestinians in Lebanon and in West Bank and Gaza.

I'm also member of the Coordinating Secretariat of the Italian Platform of NGOs for Palestine. The Italian Platform of NGOs for Palestine is a grouping of more than 25 Italian NGOs working in support of Palestinians in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Italy too with development project and information/sensitization campaigns.

The history of the Palestinian cause and of the solidarity and support from the European and international communities is a long one. States and International Organizations took a big role in this history, but perhaps the most important role has been played by the civil societies and the NGOs are one of the most significant expressions of civil societies.

I have been requested to give a lecture about the NGO contribution to the Peace Process and I will focus it on three main points:

- the Palestinian NGOs: historical backgrounds and trends, including some specific information about the new Palestinian law on NGOs;
- the International NGOs (INGOs): where general figure of characteristics, roles and aims of international development NGOs will be set out; the main institutional instruments and relevant characteristics of the European aid to Palestinians channelled through INGOs will be described and the philosophy of INGOs action in favour of the Peace Process will be showed;
- the relationship between Palestinian and International NGOs; as final remark some comments and suggestions on how such relationships can be improved will be given for discussions.

1. Palestinian NGOs: historical backgrounds and trends

1.1. From the origin to the Intifada

The socio-economic behaviour of the Palestinians tends to be quite unique. This is due to the various ups and downs in the political environment that have shaped the lives of the Palestinians throughout the 20th century. In their struggle for freedom and independence, the Palestinians were obliged to organize themselves under various rulers in order to preserve and develop their national identity.

Under Ottoman rule, for example, the Palestinians established cultural societies and various clubs to promote public policy issues and to mobilize the masses to achieve their goals. These organizations were traditionally based on religious and family affiliations and were led by prominent personalities.

During the British Mandate, the Palestinians established a mixture of religious, family-related and political organizations to pursue practical and specific projects in the socio-economic field, as well as to express and publicize their political aspirations. The organizations of this period maintained the traditional linkage to the main families and prominent figures.

The Palestinian cause has always been made up by three main elements: the land, the people and their rights, that have thus far been denied to a large extent. Palestinians were always committed to their homeland despite all hardships and conflicts. In 1948, following the war, they found themselves split into four communities: one part remained in what became Israel, one was confined to the Gaza Strip, a larger part lived in the West Bank and Jordan, and another big portion was spread throughout the Diaspora.

Under Jordanian/Egyptian rule, the situation changed. Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip established a variety of professional and charitable organizations to address the needs of local residents and to either assist, complement or oppose the respective ruler's policies. The leaders of these NGO-like bodies no longer came from traditional backgrounds but from a new, educated political elite.

A new chapter in the history of the Palestinian NGO (PNGO) community began with the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the course of the June 1967 War. Following the War of 1967, the Palestinians in the Diaspora had reached a two-thirds majority, while one-third remained inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

During the first decade of occupation, the Palestinians were confronted with three major challenges, which had an enormous impact on the shaping of their organizations. The challenges were as follows:

- the policies and practices of the Israeli occupier, which threatened the national identity and existence of the Palestinians and left their future uncertain;
- the absence of a government or political national address to develop strategies and lead the local resistance;
- the battle to maintain and develop the Palestinian linkage with the Arab World.

Out of necessity, the Palestinians adopted a strategy of steadfastness (*sumud*), which guided their actions during the first two decades of occupation. They were successful in maintaining the *status quo*, in developing their human resources and in providing services to society. They also secured funding for their NGOs, which originated mainly from UNRWA (refugees), Church-related institutions (charities, schools, hospitals), Jordan (government, municipalities, charitable organizations), Arab countries, and the US in the form of official US government funding through American Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), which aimed at 'improving the [Palestinians'] standard of living'. The US funding was coordinated with the Israeli occupation authorities, while all other aid was arranged directly with the Palestinian recipients.

With the third decade of Israeli occupation, a new chapter of resistance began under the banners of the *Intifada*. The *Intifada* was intended to change the *status quo* (i.e., to end Israeli occupation) and to allow for the building of a new society on national soil without waiting for a solution to come from outside. The *Intifada* was able to do the following:

- to Palestinize and promote the national unity of the society, to remind the world of the Palestinian cause, and to guarantee renewed recognition of and sympathy for the Palestinians;
- to demonstrate that the Green Line was a definitive borderline, inasmuch as the Israelis were reluctant to cross into the Occupied Palestinian Territories while the Palestinians were not allowed to cross into Israel;
- to allow the well-organized factions that formed the United Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) to establish a wide range of popular and neighbourhood committees. These committees, along with various independent organizations, research centers and other institutions, increased the number of PNGOs to over 2,000.

During the *Intifada* period, the NGOs developed new strategies and methods. They decided, for example, in addition to the common mass campaigns and voluntary community work, to add concrete projects for certain target groups and resistance cells operating underground. They provided all kinds of services, promoted democratic values, and mobilized the masses to foster the *Intifada* and its goals. They also built coalitions and lobbied whilst trying to win public support for their demands and aspirations. It is remarkable their ability to maintain and even increase funding in this period: the main sources of funding were the PLO, Arab states, European and US NGOs and governmental agencies. The diverse nature of the different NGOs and their activities during the *Intifada*, contributed a great deal to their institutionalization within society, despite Israeli policies that outlawed and closed down the majority of PNGOs and grassroots committees.

From the 1970s onwards, the NGOs had an enormous influence on development philosophy and policies. A good example is the field of health. In 1967, 67% of the total primary health care clinics were governmental; in 1992, only 28% were governmental while 28% were non-governmental. The apparatus of the Jordanian Government remained as it was, but did not develop, thus allowing the NGOs to take its place. The same thing occurred in other fields such as agriculture and the pre-school education (today, all pre-school education is run by the NGOs).

The NGOs clearly played a very important role, not only through their activities, but also through their developmental philosophy. If you go back to the literature of that period, you will see that there was a large debate on whether or not Palestinians were living in a stage of steadfastness. It was the NGOs that introduced the idea of resistance and also their efforts were a part of that resistance. According to their philosophy, since the aim of Israel was to annex the occupied territories, build settlements and deport as many Palestinians as possible, then it was incumbent on the NGOs to establish facts on the ground, build the institutions of the infrastructure, and help people to remain in the country and continue with their lives.

The NGOs also affected the various concepts and policies. For example, when the health NGOs adopted the modern concepts of primary health care, they were doing something totally new, because the traditional structure of the governmental health apparatus and that of UNRWA were biomedical, and the importance of primary health care had not yet been recognized. The health NGOs were successful in introducing their new way of thinking because they were able to adapt to the international approach of Primary Health Care, became popular at the international conference of Alma Ata, in 1979. The Palestinian NGOs, therefore, brought to the Palestinian society a modern concept that had worldwide support, which is why they were able to obtain funding. This is a clear example of how the NGOs can indirectly affect governmental policy by supplying information to the ministries and directing them in a certain direction.

Pluralism has been a feature of Palestinian life for almost three decades, during which the absence of a national government to deal with the policies of the Israeli occupier has resulted in the establishment of hundreds of NGOs, many of which were established by political factions, partly as a means to extend their influence in society by providing services. The NGOs were active in a variety of fields, e.g., labour and student unions, professional, charitable and health associations, women's organizations, research centers, etc. This not only enabled a high degree of social and political mobility, but also laid the foundation for a Palestinian civil society. It was also from within the NGO community that the technical committees were born, representing all factions and political streams and created on a consensus basis, in order to formulate Palestinian positions on many issues (e.g., housing, land, water, agriculture, education, health, etc.). At a later stage, the committees were to assist the Palestinian negotiating team during the Madrid Peace Conference.

Before the arrival of the PNA, the Palestinian NGOs (PNGOs) main priority consisted of a struggle against occupation and Israeli human right violations. Basically NGOs were established as an alternative to local government since political parties were banned in the Occupied Territories. These new organizations, founded for the most part by the PLO, Fateh, or the Communist Party, developed two main functions:

- First, they supported national political resistance through the advocacy for international collective human rights such as right to self-determination. They also fought against Israeli human rights violations under international humanitarian law.
- Next, within this atmosphere of crisis and political precariousness, PNGOs also focused on providing services for the population's basic need in different fields such as health, pre-school education, urban infrastructure and agriculture, in order to fill the development gaps caused by Israeli occupation.

1.2. From the PNA onward

With the arrival of the PNA, political emancipation gave rise to a new approach: PNGOs started working on individual human rights (not exclusively collective rights anymore), democracy and civil society. This created an extra role for NGOs: building an internally healthy society based on democracy and the rule of law.

With the establishment of the PNA, PNGOs found themselves at a new crossroads with two major options:

a) to be 'absorbed' within the authority's structure, for one or more of the following reasons:

- many of them were established and funded by the PLO; several of their leaders joined the PNA as a natural consequence of political events or because they had redefined their role within the newly established PNA infrastructure;
- some lacked the creativity to cope with the new political environment and joined the PNA out of a fear of becoming extinct or of a lack of alternatives;
- the matters, with which those NGOs were primarily concerned, such as housing, education or health, now fell within the responsibility of the various PNA ministries.

b) to remain independent and continue to work outside the government structure. This category, which included mainly NGOs from the opposition factions and those not directly related or linked to the activities of the PNA and its ministries, such as think tanks, research institutes, human rights or women's organizations, is divided into two groups:

- those NGOs, most of which are in the Gaza Strip, that tend to comply to the PNA Ministry of Justice's stipulations that regulated the registration, functioning and funding of NGOs;
- those that refuse to abide by such regulations until such time as there a proper legal framework will exist.

What is occurring in Palestine in the 1990s is a rare case of state building. New states are not created much any more. As the PNA develops the institutions and the legal frameworks to govern, inevitably there could be a clash with those who are to be governed. Palestinians have been without a representative government (i.e., in close and daily contact) for decades; now they have a chance to create one. But, in the past, in the absence of a government and in the face of Israeli military occupation and usurpation of rights and confiscation of lands and deportations and demolition of homes and inhumane treatment in prisons and elsewhere, it has been the NGOs and grass-roots organizations and popular committees that have sustained the movement of a society to resist such an occupation. And these NGOs were supported, funded, often created by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

With the creation of the PNA, led by the PLO, many of the NGOs that were established to act on behalf of the PLO in the occupied Palestinian territories "joined" the PNA structure and no longer can be considered "non-governmental." Still, there are many NGOs in Palestine that are either in opposition to the PLO and PNA and the current "peace process" or are neutral on these matters or maybe even supportive of the PLO but do not want to be part of the PNA. The latter two groups remain committed to working outside the government, in the non-profit, grass-roots, and/or charitable sectors.

Given the chaotic situation developing in Palestine with the piece-meal transfer of records and of authority from the Israeli occupation administration to the PNA, it is all but impossible to develop a concise picture of the NGO community in Palestine. What is clear is that the number of NGOs in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip is at least 700 (and as many as 1500). Fully half of this minimum figure of 700 (377) is found in a single bloc, the General Union of Palestinian Charitable Associations. Palestine is replete with a variety of blocs (unions, networks, federations); often there are a few different blocs within the same sector (e.g., there are at least four in health). The latter are a vestige of the divisions within Palestinian society during the occupation. Still, not all blocs should be seen merely as a vestige of internal divisions; many exist in fact to bring a unity long denied to Palestinian society.

In the case of Palestine, it is possible to classify the NGOs according to five basic categories:

- charitable societies;
- grassroots societies and organizations that try to organize the public, such as the labour unions;
- developmental organizations, such as agricultural or medical committees;
- research centers, such as PASSIA;
- institutions that defend the rights of specific groups in the society. Some of the organizations can be divided into different categories. Women's organizations, for example, can be separated into the women's centers and the women's movements. A good example of institutions that defend the interests of certain groups is the Union of the Handicapped, which struggles for the rights of the disabled. Some of these NGOs may disappear when they achieve their goals while others may continue.

Against this background, attempts to coordinate efforts within the NGO community have increased in recent years, although the networks have a rather limited mandate. The main reasons for these coalition-building efforts are the desire of the NGOs to complement each other's work, to develop a stronger voice by being represented as a group, to strengthen legitimacy, to gain increased recognition of NGO activities, and to build bridges, exchange experiences, and expand connections.

Traditionally, many of the NGOs were members of the General Union of Palestinian Charitable Associations or part of professional unions. Today, another most active body is the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO Network), which has approximately 70 members. The PNGOs pursue the three following main aims:

- to respond to the humanitarian needs of the people and serve society;
- to strengthen democracy and civil society (NGOs serve as a catalyst for creating a climate of tolerance and pluralism and help establish democratic structures);
- to work toward a constitutional government in their role as intermediaries between interest groups and the government.

There is also a trend among NGOs to create networks among organizations with similar activities; examples include the Educational Network in Ramallah, the women's unions, and the Association of Palestinian Policy and Research Institutions (APPRI). All these NGOs believe that building a strong NGO community is one of the most important preconditions for enduring political stability and legitimacy, economic growth and sustainable development in Palestine.

Another major change the PNGOs are facing is of a **financial nature**.

Under Israeli occupation since 1967, and prior to the arrival of the PNA, Palestinian NGOs (PNGOs) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were the main organizations involved in promoting development projects for Palestinians suffering from the occupation. Thus, PNGOs received tens of millions of dollars each year in financial and technical assistance from international donors - U.N. and other multilateral agencies, governments and INGOs - to help them in their tasks.

After Oslo, however, the donor community diverted much of the funding that would have usually gone to the NGOs to the PNA, to enable it to establish its administration and infrastructure. This shift in funding had a detrimental impact on the services provided by the secular NGOs, while Hamas and the other Islamic groups were able to maintain their social networks; thus, the forces within society that could act as a counterweight against fundamentalism were weakened.

In the early 1990s, the PNGOs were receiving between US\$150 million to US\$200 million a year from outside sources; by 1994, external support had dropped to about US\$90 million and by 1996, it had dropped even further to US\$60 million. As the PNA became established, the donor community made a decision to continue supporting the people of Palestine but mainly through the PNA and less and less through the Palestinian NGOs.

A related problem is caused by the fact that the PNA, considering itself the only legitimate authority with the responsibility to determine governmental goals and priorities, now insists that most part of funding be channelled through its own agencies, which then allocate the money to the NGOs. In order to secure funding mechanisms for the independent and smallest NGOs, the World Bank came up with the idea of establishing a NGO Trust Fund, which is now being administered by the Welfare Association in cooperation with the British Council and The Charities Aid Foundation in the Palestinian Territories.

Obviously some NGOs complained about the use of the foreign aid by the PNA (sometimes accused by PNGOs to spent too much on policing, security and surveillance) and others worried that whatever aid does go to NGOs will be directed to those who support the government and money will be refused to any NGO considered "opposition".

What is clear from the Palestinian case is that issues of democratization, development, and foreign assistance cannot be separated, especially given the massive amounts of money the donor community is spending for Palestinians.

1.3. The Law on "Charitable Associations and Community Organizations"

Another major concern for the future of the NGOs has to do with **regulation and registration**.

Today, the striking presence of NGOs in Palestine makes it essential that the government establishes a clear legal basis for their activity.

While there are still various laws - Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Egyptian, and Israeli - governing the Palestinian Territories, the PNA Executive has still not approved the Basic Law, thus delaying the endorsement of all other laws passed by the Legislative Council including the Law Concerning Charitable Societies, Special Bodies and Private Institutions, to which the NGOs are subjected. At the same time, the PNA is pushing the NGOs to register, but there is still some confusion as to which ministry is responsible for registering which NGO. This does not apply to the NGOs in East Jerusalem, which are forced to abide by the regulations of the Israeli authorities and are registered either under the old Ottoman Charities Law, or as private companies, or according to stipulations set by the Israeli Ministry of Interior.

As the PNA works to regulate the NGO community, there is great concern among the NGOs about the way in which the PNA will establish its mechanism to govern, coordinate and share responsibilities with the NGOs under its auspices. The legal and regulatory frames within which NGOs operate are an indicator of the government's approach toward society in general (that is to say, freedom of expression and assembly, human rights, etc.).

The summer and fall of 1995 was a crucial period in setting the stage for future state-society relations in Palestine. After negotiating and finalizing the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the Taba or "Oslo 2" Agreement), the PNA set out to draft and nearly institute a law that would govern NGOs broadly defined (charitable and relief groups, both local and international; foundations; and private institutions). This also was a time that the NGO community itself was organizing and lobbying against this particular law. Having a law to govern and regulate the NGO sector was not, in and of itself, an issue of contention for the Palestinian NGO community. It was the specific law and the general spirit of its drafting that most concerned and mobilized this community.

Given that a significant part of the law concerns the rights and responsibilities of NGOs regarding the acceptance of international aid, the draft law also was very much on the minds of international donors, such as the World Bank, International NGOs (INGOs), and the European Union.

The legal framework to which NGOs must adhere is an important place to start when discussing the role and potential of NGOs in providing services (health care, job training, literacy programs, day care centers, agricultural extension, legal advice, credit programs, and so on). It is important to know whether NGOs are given considerable latitude in planning and executing their activities or are instead restricted, controlled, and confined in those activities. Such legal frameworks also indicate the way in which a government will exercise its authority over various other aspects of society - e.g., elections, freedom of expression and assembly, human rights, trade and investment, and so on.

Among others, the Palestinian NGO network (PNGO) proposed a “Draft Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organizations”. The draft law has been approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council in a third reading in December 1998. A few days later, the law was sent to the President for signing. The draft law was returned by the Ministerial Council, who stated that the place of registration should have been changed from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Interior. The Palestinians NGOs networks (PNGO and Union of Charitable Association) maintained their stance against registering with the Ministry of Interior, preferring to register with the Ministry of Justice, and issued a memorandum to the PLC to request it to uphold the original Law in which NGOs were required to register with the Minister of Justice.

On 25th of May 1999, the Palestinian Legislative Council discussed the final contested point of the law and 38 members of the PLC voted for keeping the Ministry of Justice as the place of registration, against 12 members. However, to be in force the Law must still be ratified by the Executive Authority and published in the Official Gazette of the Palestinian National Authority.

Whatever its final status, this draft law will remain a bylaw upon which the Council will rely to edict further legislation. This draft law is an important document as it finally proposes to give NGOs legal status; moreover, it represents NGOs expectations as it consists of 90% of their amendments.

What follows is a resume of the main contents of the draft law.

First, the document identifies its scope: it concerns “any charitable Association or Community Organization with an independent judicial personality, established upon an agreement concluded among no less than seven persons to achieve legitimate objectives of public concern, without aiming at financial profit-making for sharing among the members, or at achieving any personal benefits” (Article 2). Further it defines community activity as “any social, economic, cultural, community, development or other service or activity undertaken voluntarily or optionally, that would lead to the improvement of the social, health, professional, material, spiritual, artistic, sports, cultural or educational levels of citizens in society” (Ibid.). Therefore, the diversity of the NGOs activities is recognized and legitimized provided they pursue a public and non-profit purpose.

Article 1 recognizes the principle of free activity and freedom of association: “Palestinian citizens have the right to practice social, cultural, professional and scientific activity in all freedom, including the rights to establish and run Associations and Community Organizations”. But such an activity is of course submitted to rules of procedures that the NGOs must respect in accordance with the law.

The first prerequisite for their legal recognition, existence and activity is the registration, to which a whole chapter is dedicated (Chapter 2, articles 3-8). This procedure, like all others in the draft law, is under judiciary umbrella. The PNGO network expressed its satisfaction regarding the competence of the Ministry of Justice, instead of the Ministry of Interior, as the latter is connected to security matters. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the issue is still open. In regards to registration, the draft law states first that in case of a decision “issued by the Minister refusing the request for registration, the decision should be substantiated by the causes, and the applicants have the right to contest the decision before the competent courts within a period not exceeding thirty days from the date they are notified of the decision refusing the request.” (article 4-4). Thus, no space is left for a discretionary power; any refusal must be substantiated. Moreover if the Minister does not treat the registration request in the two months following its presentation, the organization is considered registered by law (Article 3-4). These provisions represent the principle of freedom of association and of activity.

Chapter 3 establishes the rights and duties of NGOs. The primary duty of the NGOs is the financial and administrative transparency. An administrative report and a financial one each year must be handed to the Ministry of Justice, and organizations must record the identification of its members, its Board of Directors,

revenues and expenditures, etc. In addition they must deposit with the competent department (set up by the Ministry of Justice) any amendments.

Concerning their rights, they may hold transferable or not transferable funds for the achievement of their objectives, but the foreign organizations must obtain the agreement of the ministerial council. Then, they are exempted from taxes and custom duties on their transferable and not transferable funds necessary for the implementation of their objectives. Finally, they “are entitled to organize activities and establish income-generating projects provided the revenues are used to cover its activities for the public good and to set up branches inside Palestine”.

Article 10 describes the type of relations between NGOs and the Ministry: they are established on the basis of coordination, cooperation and complementarity for the public good.” Within such a framework, the dissolution is under precise conditions: an NGO may be dissolved by decision of its General Assembly or by the Ministry if it does not start its activities within the first year of its date of registration or if it has committed a substantive violation of its bylaws. The ministerial decision must state the causes and be written and the organization has the right to contest it before a court.

Though it has been argued by many that NGOs should not be under registration but rather be considered as labour unions in order to benefit from confidentiality and independence, this draft law should be warmly welcomed for strengthening the legitimacy and the credibility of NGOs by creating a clear status. It constitutes a progressive law and an essential step for the building of a strong civil society.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, there are still difficulties to have that Law in force, and the issue is still very open. The issue is a crucial one because it refers to the future of the relationships between the Political and Civil societies in the rising Palestinian State. That’s why there is a big concern for this, both in the Palestinian society and among the International community.

1.4. The role of PNGOs in the democratization process

A democratic tradition has already been rooted in Palestinian culture before the arrival of the PNA. This is demonstrated through the political diversity of different Palestinian institutions like universities, syndicates and unions and the 1996 general elections gave an impetus to this tradition.

The interim period should be viewed as a critical transitional stage for the establishment of a democratic state. More effort should be placed on realizing such realities. The role of NGOs is vital during the current stage and they must perform to the best of their ability. The NGOs task must be to consolidate the PNA’s performance and the building of the Palestinian State.

The diverse targets and duties of NGOs should be viewed in a positive sense. It is true that some NGOs aim at financial profits or always take a negative approach to political developments, but this is only a part of the social fabric of a democratic society. It is this diversity that can enhance democracy.

The impact of NGOs depends – among others - on the following factors:

- the degree of organization, stability and variety of financial resources
- the nature of relations with official and popular levels.

The basic and most important element in the work of NGOs is to strengthen and **consolidate the process of democratization**. This does not exempt other NGOs nor does it distance other political factions from the same duty. Rather, this must be viewed as a **national strategy**.

This role should operate on two levels:

- one is related to the internal operation of NGOs
- the other is related to the set of mechanisms and strategies employed.

It is not possible for NGOs to operate effectively if they do not have smooth internal functioning. NGOs should work as independent, open and democratic organisations. If any of these elements are absent, the NGOs cannot function properly. An absence of coordination and exchange is characteristic of most existing NGOs. This leads to duplicity, overlap and loss of financial resources.

In order to strengthen democracy, NGOs should try to double their efforts and consolidate their ties on the **official & public levels**. On the official level, NGOs should coordinate with 3 main components of government: executive, legislative and judicial. The public level is equally important.

At the **official level** there are three main strategies that NGOs should follow:

- Cooperate with PNA institutions and encourage them to adopt democratic procedures in their internal procedures.
- Strengthen ties with the Legislative and encourage it to pass motions to help spread democracy and respect of human rights. In this sense, NGOs can lobby for the enforcement of these motions. Moreover, NGOs should try to encourage speedy adoption of the Palestinian Basic Law.
- Work with the Judiciary to stop violations of law. The judiciary is one of the most important elements in a democratic system. It is obvious that the Palestinian judicial system needs a lot of support.

At the **public level** – in addition to the concrete services provided by NGOs - there are also 3 main areas on which to focus the work of NGOs, specifically and directly connected to the democratization process.

- Raising awareness. There is a need to develop concepts and raise awareness of rights, democracy and responsibilities among the society.
- Legal advice. Legal consultation is a service offered to those whose civic rights have been violated. The victims are represented by NGOs specialized in legal affairs.
- Elections. NGOs have an important role to play in general and local elections, which are both major components of a democratic system. NGOs can form special committees to supervise these elections, raise the electorate's awareness, and offer legal advice for candidates.

1.5. Final remark

Palestinian NGOs need to develop long-term vision and to restructure themselves for the challenges of a new era. For the coming years, as part of their state-building efforts the priorities for the Palestinian people will be to establish/restructure institutions, improve human resources, apply the rule of law, restore the services sector and infrastructure and focus on priority areas thus far neglected by the donor community, particularly in Jerusalem. The responsibilities of dealing with current and future societal issues of great importance cannot only lie with the PNA but must be shared by all citizens, whose role is embedded in the Palestinian civil society context.

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2. The International NGOs

A couple of preliminary notes.

As you can image, the world of International NGOs (INGOs) is very wide and differentiated: it reflects the variety of the civil societies from where the NGOs originate. Therefore, any generalization should be made with caution. Nevertheless there are some common traits that characterize those International NGOs (the majority) which are strongly committed in favour of the Palestinian cause. We will refer to this kind of NGOs in the afterwards.

Among European donors, countries, NGOs and other actors there is a big concern about the importance of a European presence in the Peace Process in the Middle East, instead of individual different actions and approaches by the Member States and their relevant subjects. Therefore, as Italian NGOs we are making an effort to see ourselves in the broader framework of Europe, instead of only our own national context, and also in our actions in Palestine we are trying to coordinate and unify our efforts with our European colleagues in view of a common approach. A similar effort has been made by most of European NGOs. That's why when speaking about International NGOs firstly it comes natural for us to speak of European NGOs. You will excuse me if in the afterwards I will use the terms European and International referred to NGOs in an interchangeable way. Best to say: any general comments referred to European NGOs should be easily extended also to the NGOs from North countries other than European ones.

2.1. General characteristics, roles and aims of international development NGOs

The NGOs are indispensable if development co-operation policies are to produce real and deep-rooted improvements in the lives of even the poorest and most marginalised peoples. Exclusion exists everywhere – at home but also in the developing countries and in relation between rich and poor. This is why official co-operation agencies reserve a rapidly increasing space, alongside their own large-scale programmes, for NGOs activities and public funding support to their initiatives.

No one would suggest that NGOs could do everything. They are no more perfect than anyone else. They are an irreplaceable complement to official programmes. Official agencies and governments cannot achieve development on their own, either in our own countries or in developing countries, and they know it.

What then should the NGOs' specific contribution be?

First of all, NGOs mobilise all kind of potential, in a spirit of personal commitment, be it in the North or – even more importantly – in the South. This commitment deserves support.

Then, they have an original approach to development. Not only do NGOs target marginalised population, which tend to be neglected by official policies or to which the latter do not have easy access, but they also try to base their activities on people's mobilisation and organisation for their own development, according with the beneficiaries' own ideas about their priority needs and methods.

NGOs thus play a vital role in ensuring the participative development, which is so difficult to achieve, and so important if one wants lasting results from Cooperation activities. What is more, they contribute to the creation of diverse social structures and the constitution of a democratic base at grass-roots level, indispensable for a really just and stable political democracy, which is a factor in sustainable development, and a major goal in itself.

The NGOs also frequently act directly in favour of human rights, particularly where vulnerable or minority groups are concerned.

In all these questions, it is the grass-rooted groups and the NGOs in developing countries, which are the real focus of interest, so that one of the most important justification of the International NGOs is the support they give to their partners in the South.

The international NGOs, even if only a few of them have as a sole specialisation the emergency aid, have a powerful role in emergency aid when natural or man-made disasters occur, in the distribution of food and commodities and in many other sectors.

Of course, relations between public authorities and NGOs are not always free from frictions or misunderstandings, since it is a question of combining different points of view and reaching a minimum of coherence of action between various players in the development field.

Some developing countries are still regarded as vast expanses of poverty and misery, an unchanging situation which only charitable acts on the part of better-off population in the North can remedy. This depressing picture is due, amongst other things, to media saturation coverage of extreme situations, which generates a totally negative perception of these countries as a whole. But many examples show that the South is on the move, taking on responsibility, organising himself and making efforts to improve its lot. People in developing countries often have their own ideas about how to improve their situation in the long term. However, the techniques and means for realising their objectives are often lacking. So, often local populations contact an international NGO specialised in development. Such an organisation may be able to help them get together the means necessary to carry out their projects.

The northern NGOs have a major role to play in their home country to be able to respond to request from people in the South. They mobilise support for development projects and draw the attention of the man in the street to what is happening in the South of the world. This is an essential function since, given Western Countries' difficult social and economic situation and in the wake of the political and economic upheavals in Balkans and east Europe, citizens of Western Countries are likely to feel less and less concerned about North/South relationships, and the problems of the developing countries, even though, in the long term, these problems also affect industrialised countries.

In western countries, the view held about developing countries is usually made up of stereotyped images deeply rooted in popular culture. They include a number of often-racist prejudices, which are without foundation. A number of causes for so-called "under-development" are to be found in the North, both in the behaviour of the consumers and in policies which take scant account of the most underprivileged population in the South. It is therefore of paramount importance that, alongside action in the developing countries, there should be initiatives in the North aimed at changing behaviour patterns which have negative effects in the most deprived population in the South. A wide variety of NGOs projects have taken up this challenge.

What is a development International NGO?

It is difficult to give a precise definition. In general terms, it is a private, non-profit-making organisation established on voluntary basis and with the aim of pursuing international solidarity activities. NGOs action is based on ethic rather than profit.

The NGOs rely on popular support that can be mobilised in the field of fund-raising and, usually, on the support of the national governments, whose interest is the growing and the flowering of the "civil society".

There is an enormous variety of NGOs in Europe, reflecting the diversity of the world of voluntary associations of which they constitute one of the principal forces. They emanate directly from the dynamism of European civic society and are answerable to their private and public sponsors, in respect to whom they must be totally transparent regarding the way they manage the funds, which are risen.

The NGOs rely on popular support and therefore raise funds from private sources. They are also able to call upon the public purse and are able to benefit from national and EU Community co-financing as well as fund from multilateral bodies, like UN agencies.

The NGOs are required to publish a balance sheet of their activities, giving a realistic overview both of what they do and of the political, economic social context in which they work.

Development NGOs aim to strengthen local organisations and public and private structures in the targeted Countries, so they can become self-supporting in the long term.

Their work in the targeted countries can take various forms:

- implementing projects or part of project themselves
- financing organisation and projects
- providing other types of assistance (technical assistance, training, provision of specialised equipment, etc.)
- supplying a complete service together with follow-up

Their contacts & partners in the South may have different profiles:

- grass-roots organisation (rural groups, village associations, co-operatives, etc.)
- regional organisations which have a wider radius of action
- local NGOs
- governmental institutions (central and local)

In their home country, the NGOs conduct public-awareness campaigns concerning major North/South topics, such as debt, the environment, world trade, regional conflicts and peace process, etc.

They also lobby governments in the north, urging the latter to adopt co-operation policies, which are more advantageous for those in developing countries.

Why do the EU Community and the national governments of Member States support the activities of development NGOs?

There is an increasing commitment of the EU governments towards the non-governmental organisations as the role of the civil society is felt of paramount importance for the strengthening of a democratic and fair society not only in the south of the world but in the north as well.

The governments recognise the fundamental influence NGOs have on European public opinion with regard to development problems in the south of the world and east Europe.

The NGOs maintain direct and continuous contact with the recipient populations, enabling them to understand and meet genuine needs. Working in partnership with the NGOs enables the EU Community and the national governments to respond directly to the needs of the marginalised populations. It is also the only mean they have of acting on a development level in countries where the political situation excludes any official Cooperation. The NGOs are guarantors of the correct allocation of aid to the recipient populations in places where respect for human right and legitimate government is often lacking.

The often small size of the NGOs, the motivation and ethical commitment of their personnel, and their in-depth knowledge of the field permit rapid and effective action at a lower cost as compared with governmental intervention operations. The NGOs, of course, cannot do everything, but their action is an essential addition to that of the governments.

The growing role of NGOs involvement in a vast array of activities calls for improved qualifications for staff working with NGOs, both in the north and in the South. Development projects today include such areas as saving/loans, employment, health structures, etc., which demand skilled personnel to guarantee the long-term survival of the operation. An "amateur" approach risks disappointing both the recipient population and the donors.

However, although greater and greater professionalism appears essential, the NGOs strive to retain their own approach, motivated by a moral commitment rather than profit or a purely technical approach.

Why do NGOs seek for partnership with EU Community and national governments?

The first reason is, obviously, financial, to have more funds for the work the NGO wish to carry out. Increased resources will enable them to work on a larger scale and the experience acquired in a small project can be converted into a programme benefiting a greater number of people.

The NGOs, through financing, seek to diversify the governmental support to development projects.

The governmental involvement in an NGO project may facilitates the NGOs work among the recipient population.

The NGOs in the North have become increasingly credible and strong players on the development Cooperation stage, to such an extent that, nowadays, they have considerable influence over governmental development policies.

The support they give to their partners in the South has enabled the latter to organise themselves and to take responsibility for virtually all project implementation. This new situation is currently generating a reorientation of the activities of NGOs in the North towards a genuine partnership, which is encouraged by the EU and national governments. As the spirit of co-operation has developed to a considerable extent in the South, local partners are taking over not only the implementation of actions but also technical support. This development should be seen as a logical step in NGOs activities, which aim to help the organisations representing the local population in their activities so that, in the long term, they can become independent.

Certain campaigns aimed at raising development funds are still seen within the context of giving assistance "the rich North must help the poor South". This generates actions motivated by feeling of guilt and pity, a concept to be regarded as out-of-date. The NGOs are endeavouring to get away from this donor/recipient relationship because, to a certain extent, it implies a hierarchical structure. NGOs from the North and the South must be on the same footing, each making its own contribution to development on the sole basis of its capabilities.

The NGOs in from the North have to play a more prominent role in the field of European campaigns to raise public awareness and in lobbying politicians on the matter of development and North/South relationship.

This is undoubtedly one of the most important contributions NGOs in the North can make and it is one of the ways in which will be called upon to concentrate they efforts in future years.

Partners from the South are also expressing their desire to take part in a joint reflection on major North/South problems, which constitutes an excellent opportunity for a mutual learning process.

2.2. The International NGOs and Palestinians: the European context

International NGOs are working in support of Palestinians since a long time, throughout solidarity activities and campaigns, emergency/relief operations, development projects, cultural activities, etc., both in the Northern countries and in the field, in Palestine and in the countries where mostly the Palestinian Diaspora took place.

It would be a wrong way to intend the work of International NGOs as only their concrete projects carried out. European and International NGOs do not intend their action in favour of Palestinians as a mere humanitarian or relief practice, but as a contribution to the Peace Process. In other words, European NGOs attribute to their action a clear political meaning, perhaps more important than the specific concrete projects.

European NGOs intend to contribute to the peace process in the region, respecting the autonomy and self-determination of the Palestinian people. Within this framework our work aims to support institutions and organizations concretely involved in the peace process in the Palestinian community - although without directly interfering with its internal political relationships.

Our work is aimed to mainly support the ongoing development processes in the Palestinian community aimed to recognize the economic, human, social and political rights of Palestinians.

The European NGOs and the EU cooperation with Palestinians: general figures

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 active role in the region. The Strasbourg Declaration focussed on priority areas for support: small-scale employment-generating projects; measures in the agricultural and industrial sectors, especially those which support increased food self-sufficiency; education and training, particularly in vocational and technical fields; and the upgrading of Palestinian institutions and professional organisations.

The EU is the biggest donor for reconstruction of the Palestinian Territories. In November 1993, it was decided that in 1994-98 ECU 500 million would be provided in aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the EU pledging some ECU 50 million in grants each year, and the balance from long-term European Investment Bank loans.

The European funds for Palestinians comes not only from the European Commission but also from the Member States government (through the bilateral aid), civil societies, public and NGOs.

Funds from European Commission channelled through European NGOs can be divided in two major categories:

- the EU co-financing for development projects promoted by European NGOs, through a specific budget line dedicated to the NGOs;
- the humanitarian/emergency projects financed by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), for the most part implemented through European NGOs.

As far as the first category is concerned (EU co-financing), what follows is a synthetic resume of its main characteristics (source: European Commission DGVIII):

- The total number of actions (projects and block grants) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip co-financed by the European Commission DG VIII A.4 in the period 1979 through to 1997 inclusive reached 254.
- The total amount of money invested by European NGOs in this period amounts to almost 60 MECUs. The total financed by the European Commission amounts to 20 MECUs, or a third.
- The most important themes per action are health-related, education-related, training, gender, agriculture and human rights in this order.
- British, Italian, French and Belgian NGOs are the most active European NGOs in West Bank and Gaza Strip in terms of number of actions.

The ECHO actions in favour of Palestinians dates from 1993 as the Humanitarian Office was set up just in 1992.

- The total amount of money spent by ECHO in favour of Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza in the period 1993 through to 1998 inclusive amounts to more than 41 MECUs. It is worth to mention that ECHO has spent more than 12 MECUs in the same period for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon.
- The most part of such money has been spent through European NGOs. Some projects have been implemented also through international organizations such as UNRWA, UNICEF and WHO.
- French and Italian NGOs are the most active European NGOs with ECHO projects in West Bank and Gaza.
- ECHO aid has mainly been focused on the health sector, as structures in the sector have been collapsing, 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 of the aid provided by ECHO to Palestinians.

As easily understandable from the above figures, ECHO represents one of the most important financial instruments for the European aid in favour of Palestinians, channelled through European NGOs. Therefore it deserves some more information.

As mentioned, the health sector is a priority. Structures are collapsing, and ECHO has consequently focused the lion's share of its attention and resources to improving the situation.

In Palestine, it supplied drugs and medical equipment. ECHO's previous contributions to the Bir Zeit University Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health provided the Palestinian Authority with a reliable laboratory for the analysis and control of locally produced medication.

Funds were also granted to various European partners NGOs to assist private and public sector hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Support was made available for specialized institutions such as blood banks, rehabilitation centres for handicapped, kindergartens and local NGOs. Other packages have been aimed at training health staff, assisting detainees and reorganising drugs storage and distribution systems at the Ramallah central pharmacy.

In response to repeated closures of the Territories, emergency humanitarian aid has been delivered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and World Food Program (WFP) to the most vulnerable, and to hardship cases among the Palestinian population.

In Lebanon, ECHO's work focused on the estimated 340,000 Palestinian refugees who live in camps around the main cities. Unlike Syria or Jordan, Lebanon has made little effort to integrate these refugees, and they are not entitled to treatment under the National Health Service, nor to housing or education. The Lebanese economy is still recovering from the 17-year civil war which ended in 1991, and about a third of its people are living below the poverty line. ECHO's pledge to assist all vulnerable groups has also ensured a substantial allowance for Lebanese living in poverty. Fast-track decisions have been taken in sending emergency aid in critical situations, in particular, to help displaced Lebanese after Israeli military operations in Southern Lebanon in April 1996. Up to 55% of the population (Lebanese, Palestinian) have no access to welfare. ECHO has funded the Palestine Red Crescent Society-Lebanon (PRCS-L) through partner NGOs and UNRWA, contributing to the rehabilitation and improvement of hospitals, clinics and drug centres in Lebanon.

In last years ECHO started operations targeting Palestinian refugees living in Jordan and Syria where European NGOs are working alongside UNRWA to implement emergency relief and rehabilitation projects in refugee camps.

The European NGOs and the EU cooperation with Palestinians: policy-related questions

There is a common concern about the need to increase as much as possible the EU political role in the peace process. Such political role is a priority for the EU 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 strong political commitment for fair and lasting peace in the region.

For instance, the European NGOs consider not at all more tolerable the commercial facilities accorded to Israel without the compliance of the commercial agreement with the EU while Israel has committed abuses and frauds in prejudice of the weak Palestinian economy and of the EU itself.

To this regard, it is worthwhile to mention that on April 1998 the General Assembly of the European development NGOs voted a resolution proposed by the Italian Platform of NGOs for Palestine and by the Italian Assembly of NGOs concerning actions in favour of the peace process in the Middle East. The resolution claims for a stronger commitment of the Commission, of the European Parliament and of all the Member States in favour of a quick resumption of the peace process and of the respect of the Oslo Agreements. Namely, the European NGOs claimed to make conditional the commercial agreements between the EU and Israel on the restarting and respect of the peace process and Oslo Agreements. The European NGOs invited to support a boycott campaign of the products from the Israeli settlements, as pressure measure on the Israeli Government to respect the Palestinian's people rights. The European civil society has

then been invited to mobilize itself and to join the Palestinians and Israeli democratic and progressive organizations in such boycott campaign.

The needed stronger political role of the EU should back-up and give more impact to the economic and technical cooperation commitment of the EU towards the reconstruction of Palestine.

ECHO has played an important role in such cooperation in recent years and the European NGOs have been relevant actors.

Emergency has not ended. Needs for emergency and humanitarian aid are still a lot. So that The ECHO actions must continue.

Nevertheless the European NGOs realise that is now the time also to give more impulse to middle and long term rehabilitation and development programmes, through operational instruments different than and complementary to ECHO.

Apart from the acute emergency, there is also a structural emergency that must be faced up with appropriate instruments.

It is the now time to encourage as much as possible development projects aimed to reinforce the ongoing development processes in the Palestinian society, in several crucial sectors: environment protections; human resources training; income generating activities; health and social issues; support for local organizations for civil rights; institution building, etc.

Some conditions are nevertheless requested to give more impact to such kind of projects: the political back up and action from the EU and the professional qualifications of European NGOs.

The impact of humanitarian as development projects in Palestine is currently heavy 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.

On the other side, all international NGOs should be as much as possible aware of the need to be professionally qualified for development projects and should be technically prepared as the local critical situation requires.

Humanitarian and rehabilitation projects should then 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 dialogue that the European NGOs organized themselves in national platforms and in the European Co-ordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP).

Such instruments facilitate the implementation of national and European wide information campaigns about the Palestinian cause, as well as the participation to national and European tables of discussion with national government and with the European Commission on methods and strategies of cooperation with Palestinians.

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

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

The European and International NGOs are required to be not only implementing agency of cooperation programmes. More and more as NGOs we intend to be political actors able to take part in discussion with the policy makers and to contribute to the definition of sound political strategies.

In this sense, we hope this dialogue with the European Commission will be more and more maintained and kept opened.

2.3. The role of the European (and International) NGOs in Palestine

In this context, the role of European (and international as well) NGOs is fundamental.

Firstly, the European NGOs can concretely contribute to the growth of a Palestinian democratic and civil society.

In this sense 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. Unfortunately some of them are inconsistent and others are just the screens for particularisms, for private and political interests and goals that have nothing to do with the real needs and interests of the majority of the Palestinians.

A lasting, consistent and rooted presence of European NGOs can contribute to stimulate a process in the Palestinian society by virtue of which good and sound Palestinian NGOs will naturally be strengthened and empowered and the insane and particularistic groups will lose ground.

European NGOs can also facilitate better relationships, co-ordination and integration of Palestinians NGOs among themselves and with the Palestinian National Authority. In this moment of organization of a new Palestinian State, the contribution and the collaboration of all valid actors are needed as much as ever. The European Union and the International community should favour in any way such integration and cooperation.

The European NGOs are players that in such a way are and must be outside from the political diatribes internal to the Palestinian society. Therefore they can act as a bridge between the civil and political dimensions of the Palestinian society. European NGOs could enhance the dialogue between local NGOs and the PNA, especially at the present when the PNA is defining a law to regulate the activity of the Palestinian NGOs.

Secondly, the work of the European NGOs represents a fundamental contribution to encourage the dialogue and the meeting among peoples 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.

Lastly, there are also practical reasons for which donors should more rely on NGOs to implement cooperation programmes. NGOs are no-profit, can mobilise high qualified and technical resources from their countries, can promote the participation of European qualified institutions as municipalities, local administrations, etc. Moreover, NGOs are used to establish direct, structural and locally based relationships with the beneficiaries. Therefore their acceptance from the Palestinian civil society is facilitated.

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.

The role of European NGOs must not be limited to humanitarian and emergency operations. The increasing involvement of European NGOs in development programmes would allow a better and stronger rooting of the NGOs in the Palestinian civil society, empowering their role of democratic and civil promotion.

The critical situation and the tragedy of Palestinians claim for a big and permanent effort for all of us NGOs to be up to the task we can play.

The adoption of common Codes of Conduct can be an instrument to qualify the European NGOs practices in front of our origin countries, of the donors, of our local partners and in front of the beneficiaries of our projects. A Code of Conduct has the merit to openly evidence common strategies, methods, and aims and therefore is an instrument of transparency allowing everybody to control and monitor the NGOs practices.

As Italian Platform for Palestine we recently adopted a Code of Conduct with this aim.

A Code of Conduct for INGOs: the Code of Conduct of the Italian Platform of NGOs for Palestine

Italian NGOs apply a Code of Conduct consistent with their strategic and methodological guidelines when formulating and implementing their humanitarian, rehabilitation or development cooperation projects in Palestine. This enhances the work of the management group and of all those who, in Italy and abroad, identify, implement and monitor them while in progress.

1. The Italian NGOs, through their action and their presence in Palestine, intend to contribute to the peace process in the region respecting the autonomy and self-determination of the Palestinian people. Within this framework, our work aims to support in the Palestinian community - although without directly interfering with its internal political relationships - institutions, organizations and individuals concretely involved for the peace process and democracy.
2. Italian NGOs projects must be designed to meet the real needs and to improve the quality of life of Palestinian population, with special attention to the most disadvantaged groups. Projects must be defined in accordance with the local economic and social features and respecting the local culture.
3. In order to guarantee high standards of project effectiveness, careful attention must be devoted to identifying, planning, monitoring and evaluating them. Beneficiaries must be involved in these exercises and be given the feedback. Needs evaluation and project planning must be consistent with the general aims of the support to the peace process and the improvement of the quality of life of Palestinians. Italian NGOs are therefore committed to exert a constant attention to such general aims be always respected in their work, thus avoiding to support operations with scarce and limited impact.
4. In practice, cooperation sets out to make the most of local technical, professional and material resources. This means, for example, that the functions assigned to expatriate personnel must not mortify or sideline the roles and contributions of local personnel but rather foster them and fully benefit from them. This includes promoting forms of cooperation among the Palestinian institutions, governmental and not.
5. Activities of the Italian NGOs tend to strengthen, improve and if necessary modify national development plans, but in no case must they be designed without taking account of them. Cooperation cannot be superimposed or take the place of the local planning authorities. On the contrary, it is only by acting in total respect for the role of these authorities and by engaging in dialogue with them that cooperation can enjoy the authority and prestige it needs to negotiate, whenever necessary, the introduction of corrective measures into local policies and plans.
6. Professionalism is an essential ethical principle, which typifies the relationship that exists between the Italian NGOs and the Palestinian community and is a precondition for establishing sound, and effective relations based on mutual respect and cooperation.
7. Notwithstanding the principle of non-interference in the political relationships internal to the Palestinian society, Italian NGOs deems it appropriate to promote the role played by institutions and organisations which actually contribute to development and democratisation processes, through specific practical forms of cooperation. In this regard, Italian NGOs attributes great importance to appraising the role of associations of women and those representing the interests of small producers and in general of marginal individuals and groups.
8. For reasons of transparency, Italian NGOs commit themselves to keep Palestinian institutions, associations and local communities fully briefed on the sources of the funding provided to make specific projects possible.
9. Projects must be managed so that they ensure economic, social and institutional sustainability and guarantee long-term benefits. Their management must also take account of the need to optimise financial resource-use, in order to bring the greatest possible benefit to the local people.
10. Concrete co-ordination among international cooperation agencies and Palestinians institutions and organisations is an important means of ensuring greater effectiveness to the work and to the policies being implemented. In this connection, Italian NGOs are willing at all times to publicise information on its work.

The European Co-ordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP)

International NGOs co-ordination on the question of Palestine began in 1983 when the United Nations called in Geneva the International Conference on the question of Palestine following the General Assembly's resolutions of 1981 and 1982. A great number of NGOs attended this official Conference as observers.

This led the 95th plenary meeting of the General Assembly to recommend to the UN Committee on the inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to the division on Palestinian rights "increased contacts with non-governmental organisations in different regions in order to heighten awareness of the facts related to Palestine".

NGO co-ordination started in 1983 through the constitution of the International Co-ordination Committee on the Question of Palestine (ICCP), which at the time brought together some 1,200 NGOs concerned with Palestine.

In 1986, the European Co-ordination Committee on the Question of Palestine (ECCP) was set up with its own autonomous structure and comprising some 300 European NGOs. Since then the ECCP has been co-operating with both UN Committee and the ICCP. In order to be at the heart of the European Community political, administrative and development decision making, the ECCP set up its office in Brussels and was registered as an association under Belgian law.

Last June ECCP launched a European Campaign for Raising the Awareness of the European Peoples about the National, Social, Economic and Human Rights of the Palestinian People, with the following main objectives:

- To revive the solidarity movement in Europe in favour of the Palestinian people in support of its national rights including its right to development.
- To lobby European States and the European Union institutions to suspend any preferential economic status granted to Israel until it complies with all the agreements it has signed with the Palestinian National Authority.

The campaign focuses on promoting the quest for peace, which requires:

- a. The withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from Palestinian territory including East Jerusalem,
- b. The dismantling of all Israeli settlements in Palestine,
- c. The right of return of all refugees who wishes to come back to their homeland,
- d. The unconditional release of all Palestinian prisoners,
- e. The establishment of the independent State of Palestine.

The ECCP believes that there can be no comprehensive, just and lasting peace unless Israel implements all UN Resolutions relevant to the above mentioned points.

3. The relationship between International NGOs and Palestinian NGOs

To complete the framework, I think it is useful to spend some more words about the state of relationships between INGOs and PNGOs, about major crucial issues that characterizes this relation.

In my speech I tried to give a synthetic but global vision of both the two worlds of Palestinian and International /European NGOs highlighting their background, their main aims, scopes, actions and the political issues they are facing up, as far as their commitment for the Palestinian cause is concerned.

Nevertheless I remarked the big variety of such two worlds, that reflects the variety of the civil societies they come from. Therefore I advised that any kind of generalization is dangerous: both in the Palestinian and in the Northern countries societies there are NGOs that are sound, transparent, honest, professional, sincerely committed towards the principle of democracy, equity and development, sincerely on the side of the most disadvantaged people, etc.; but in both the societies there are also NGOs with different traits, that reflects particularisms instead of general interests, that are not so transparent and honest, that are not always properly skilled, etc.

So that important efforts are strongly requested by both the INGOs and the PNGOs to create a sound floor in their own civil societies where the good NGOs could grow and extend their actions.

Important efforts are also needed by INGOs and PNGOs to ameliorate themselves, their efficiency of their actions, their relationships with the communities where they are from, their relationships with the other bodies of their societies, governmental and not, their relationships with the international community of donors as well to give impulse and better orientate the world-wide effort to ameliorate the living conditions of Palestinians and to promote the Peace in the region.

Efforts must be done also to ameliorate relationships and mutual understanding between INGOs and PNGOs.

The starting point is the mutual comprehension of the different cultural models pertaining to the Palestinians and International NGOs.

INGOs should not substitute for PNGOs, but should work together in partnership, keeping into account that the prime actors for the growing of a democratic, free and equitable Palestinian society must be the Palestinians.

Partnership includes a mutual exchange of experience and skills and the development of new models and solutions suitable for the Palestinian society.

PNGOs should not see at INGOs as to somebody who wants to impose his own cultural model or his ideas and projects, but to somebody with specific and original experiences that could contribute to create a new practical and operational knowledge regarding the construction of a new State and of a new society.

INGOs should carefully consider the characteristics of the country and of the society where they are working. Palestinian people have their own specificity. The Palestinian civil society developed its own model of development and INGOs should duly take this model into account.

Relationships between INGOs and PNGOs should be mutually inspired to the principle of transparency in the management procedures of funds and projects.

Priorities of action should be jointly decided on the basis of consultation and not imposed by anyone.

Duplications and overlapping of services and initiatives should be avoided through due coordination mechanisms.

Big concern should be given to the continuity and sustainability of the projects, avoiding – when possible – short-term approaches in favour of long or middle term development initiatives.

Sensitivity should be maintained and reinforced both by INGOs and PNGOs toward the respective cultural models and social values and toward the funding mechanisms of the international donors.

It is also very important that PNGOs and INGOs coordinate their efforts to lobby the funding institutions. In assisting the state-building and developmental efforts of the Palestinians in general, the donors should apply certain criteria with regard to project identification and prioritization, according to which the relationship between them and their Palestinian counterparts (NGOs and governmental bodies) should be based. Nevertheless, there is a danger that NGO activities will become skewed toward the interests and agendas of the donors rather than concentrate on local development priorities. Dependence on donors may lead to the NGOs re-prioritizing their own agendas, i.e., in order to obtain the funding to run projects, they may tend to reformulate their self-stated goals and to adopt approaches to development that are dictated by the donor's aid system. That's why it is essential the lobby of NGOs toward the donors, to make them aware of the real needs of the country, to make them change, when necessary, their philosophy and their condition of financial and material support. PNGOs and INGOs should be proactive in the relevant international seats to orientate methods and strategies of the international aid to Palestinians.

Partnership with INGOs has strongly contributed to strengthening of PNGOs in terms of their capacity, competence and influence. INGOs have supported the initiatives of PNGOs to develop models in different areas that are applicable in the Palestinian context. The support provided by INGOs has given the PNGOs an opportunity to build and develop various sectors like health, pre-school education and rehabilitation.

The partnership between INGOs and PNGOs resulted into enhancing the solidarity movement with the Palestinian cause and the international community has provided a great support to the Palestinian cause.

The PNGOs community in Palestine has witnessed a great development during the last 25 years. Their competence and ability to influence national policies have been remarkably recognized. The impact of their work on the Palestinian community has been widely felt. The role of PNGOs has been well acknowledged in the Palestinian national struggle against the occupation. The strong NGO movement in Palestine has contributed significantly to a strong base for civil society.

The rich experience accumulated over the years affected their role in the Palestinian society. Of course, the continuous support of INGOs has enriched and empowered the Palestinian NGOs and made the achievements possible.

Some WEB sites of interest concerning Question of Palestine and Palestinian NGOs

Birzeit University(<http://www.birzeit.edu/>)

Baraka (About Palestinian NGOs and Palestinians related sites) (<http://www.baraka.org/>)

Passia Palestinian Academy Society for the Study of International Affairs (<http://www.passia.org/>)

Palestinian National Authority Official website (<http://www.pna.net/>)

UNISPAL (United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine)

(<http://www.domino.un.org/UNISPAL.nsf>)

(<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/>)