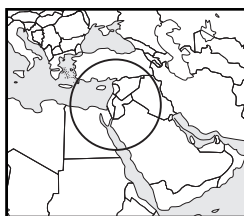


Social development under siege

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Without progress in the peace process, serious social development in Palestine will remain hostage to Israeli policies of closure, economic strangulation and violence. The deterioration of social development since September 2000 is a result of Israeli, rather than Palestinian, policy, and it drastically illustrates the Palestinian Authority's limitations in determining social development.

In signing on to the Copenhagen commitments, the Palestinian Authority (PA) solemnly pledged to promote social development. In 2000, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza still lacked sovereignty over the territories defined under UN Resolutions and international agreements. The PA is not a government with legal power over a specified territory or a defined people. Under these conditions, assessment of the PA's record in fulfilling the Copenhagen commitments is fraught with difficulties.

The shortcomings and complexity of the Palestinian situation and the PA is highlighted in the new Al-Aqsa Intifada. The deterioration of social development since September 2000 is a result of Israeli, rather than Palestinian, policy, and it drastically illustrates the PA's limitations in determining social development. Yet assessing the conscious national policy of the Israelis to create poverty and destitution in the West Bank and Gaza are outside the scope of this report. As a consequence, the report attempts to balance an illustration of the deterioration in social development in the West Bank and Gaza (as a result of Israeli policy) with an assessment of the PA's work throughout the year in social development. Without progress in the peace process, serious social development in Palestine will remain hostage to Israeli policies of closure, economic strangulation and violence.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada and social development

The eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, accompanied by Israeli attacks and closure of Palestinian residential areas throughout the West Bank and Gaza, resulted in an overwhelming deterioration in economic and social development in Palestine. Throughout the last quarter of 2000, the Palestinian economy lost USD 15 million daily.¹ The loss resulting from the Israeli bombing of residential buildings and factories, and the destruction of infrastructure, including roads and water systems, amounts to tens of millions of dollars.² Poverty rose sharply. According to United Nations Special Coordinator's Office (UNSCO) estimates, the number of Palestinians living below the poverty line increased by 50% since September from 650,000 to over one million.³ Unemployment increased from 10% to 28.3% in the last three months of 2000.⁴

Health and healthcare are equally threatened. In raw numbers, 377 Palestinians were killed and over 12,000 injured between September and January of 2000. Over 0.5% of all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been injured since September.⁵ Hospitals have come under Israeli gunfire, and movement restriction has caused deaths at checkpoints.⁶ Medical goods are in short supply and are often denied entry by Israeli checkpoints. The Union Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) reports that "the existing situation of closure and siege undermines the whole primary health care system due to the restriction of movement, and undermines existing health initiatives, such as primary health care clinics, mother-child health clinics and immunization programs."⁷ Under circumstances of medical emergency, closure and military attack, the healthcare system is close to collapse.

Education is also suffering. Road blockades and closures erected by the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza routinely deny children and youth access to schools that remain open. Between September and January, the average number of students forced to stay at home numbered 36,354. The Ministry of Education estimates that over 2 million teaching hours have been lost since September, representing an average loss of income of more than 85 days per teacher.⁸ The Israeli army forced school infrastructure projects to be compromised or ended.

Children and youth are especially vulnerable. Of those killed since September, 35% were under age 18.⁹ Nearly 2,000 youth have been injured.¹⁰ Women have also been adversely affected. The household and micro-business sector, managed mostly by women, witnessed a fall in revenue, production and liquidity as a result of closures.¹¹ There have been several cases of women having to give birth in cars at checkpoints because the Israeli army would not let them get to hospital. Even the disabled came under fire. A school for the blind in Ramallah received 50-caliber machine-gun fire from the neighbouring Bessgot settlement.

1 *Al-Ayyam Newspaper*, 24 January 2001, p. 11.

2 *Ibid.*

3 UNSCO "The Impact on the Palestinian Economy of Confrontations, Mobility Restrictions and Border Closures, 1 October 2000 - 31 January 2001", Office of the UN Special Co-Ordinator, 2001, p. 2. Available through www.unsco.org.

4 The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labor Force Survey, Forth Quarter of the Year 2000, Press conference on the results of the Labor Force Survey, February 2000.

5 Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) "Healthcare Under Siege II: The Health Situation of Palestinians During the First four months of the Intifada (September 28, 2000-January 28, 2001)", p. 25. Available at www.upmrc.org.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

8 The information in this paragraph is available through the Ministry of Education, Educational Planning and Development Department, "A Report on the Educational Process during the INTIFADA for the Period of 29 September 2000 until 15 January 2001", 2001.

9 UPMRC, p. 4.

10 Ministry of Education, 2001.

11 Bisan Center "Micro-Finance in Palestine: A Study of Supply and Demand and the Impacts of the Al-Aqsa Intifada," p. 9.

Certainly since September, the right of self-determination on the part of the Palestinian people has been under threat. Despite the financial and moral support of the international community, Palestinians have yet to gain a state. The occupation remains in force, and the rights of Palestinians who have been languishing in refugee camps for nearly 53 years are under continual threat. Clearly the Copenhagen provisions for the political, legal, material, and social restitution of all refugees continues to be denied to Palestinians.

Actions of the Palestinian Authority

The legal environment

The main achievement of 2000 was the creation of the Palestinian Judicial Higher Council and the support of this authority by the legal establishment. There has been an increase in the number of judges trying cases, and financing of the new authority is independent of the legislative and executive branches of the PA. The main shortcomings of 2000 include the lack of new elections for office; the lack of Basic Law (constitution) endorsement on the part of the executive; a consequent lack of clarity between the different branches of government, failure of execution of endorsed laws, numerous presidential decrees, and the creation of military and national security courts that have been especially active since September 2000.

Poverty eradication

Since September, poverty has increased by 50% as a result of Israeli policies of closure and economic strangulation and should not be attributed to the PA. In general though, poverty alleviation was not high on the PA's priority list and there were no specific plans for poverty alleviation in the PA's 2000 developmental plan. Palestinians have no social security provisions. The PA continues to ignore vital poverty related issues such as creation of a minimum wage. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation has been active recently in pulling together committees on the issue of poverty, specifically for oversight of The Comprehensive National Plan for Fighting Poverty, but this is only in its infancy.

Increased employment

Unemployment declined from 29% in 1995 to 10% before September. In this regard, it appears that the PA was effective in pursuing the commitment to full employment signed in Copenhagen. In general, increased employment came through public sector employment strategies and private sector expansion. The Ministry of Labour continues to work on labour strategies, though these efforts are difficult to quantify. Workers rights received a boost in 2000 with the endorsement of the Palestinian Work Law.

Disenfranchised groups

Over the course of 2000, the PA sought to assist women, children and the disabled through the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Department of Childhood and the Family. Successes include the drafting of a law against child abuse and child work, the establishment of several child shelters, the endorsement of the Law Concerning the Disabled, and work on providing care cards to the disabled. With regard to women's rights, the PA undertook no significant work in 2000. Other shortcomings include the continuing high level of childhood labour; the fact that the endorsed disabilities law is not enforced; public buildings remain inaccessible to the disabled; and continuing discrimination and lack of employment for women and the disabled.

Social services

Reasonable successes were achieved in both the health and education sectors. The health sector saw an increased availability of hospitals prior to the Intifada, increased insurance rates among Palestinians, a decreasing mortality rate among infants, and increased infant birth weight. In the education sector, 59 new schools were constructed, a national curriculum was developed, the number of teachers increased, and the number of school dropouts decreased. Shortcomings in the health sector in 2000 include a continuing need for more clinics, lack of national health insurance, lack of first aid health services, high levels of early marriage and a lack of healthcare knowledge dissemination for women and the poor. Shortcomings in the education sector include: the increasing student-teacher ratio, overcrowding, lack of technical facilities, low teacher income, lack of basic skills acquisition, lack of vocational training, and lack of gender based curricula.

Governmental accountability

Increasing levels of institutionalisation in 2000 point to improved levels of accountability on micro-level matters, though the lack of scheduled elections seriously tarnishes the PA. Successes include the formation of the Higher Council for Development for following up on PA economic policies, the creation of the Palestinian Investment Fund to manage the PA's economic activities, the maintenance of a value-added tax (VAT), increased regulation of employment in the public sector, and increased financial transparency relating to investment and trade. There should have been both municipal and national level elections in 2000, but these were not held.

Conclusion

For serious work in social development in Palestine to continue apace, it would appear that a political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is in desperate need. Without this, PA policies and actions for social development will always remain under Israeli tutelage. For serious success in social development, the Palestinians need a sovereign state. ■

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