

# Steadfastness under Adversity

Political Developments  
in Palestine over Two Decades



By Zahira Kamal

A discussion of the political developments over the last twenty years entails a review of the era that followed the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the subsequent Gaza-Jericho First agreement in May 1994, and the Interim Agreement in September 1995. These agreements divided Palestinian cities and villages into areas classified as “A” (including main urban centers), “B” (including Palestinian towns and villages), and “C” (including small villages, water resources, agricultural lands, and natural resources) – with a negative impact on Palestine’s geographic contiguity. Furthermore, these agreements have restricted Palestinian action at political, economic, and social levels, particularly because Israel has extended efforts, with Zionist and racist policies, to abort the Palestinian liberation project that aims to end the Israeli occupation, establish a contiguous and sovereign Palestinian state in all the territories that were occupied in June 1967, ensure the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, and guarantee the right of return of Palestinian refugees according to UN Resolution 194. The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995 constituted a death sentence for the peace process. Yet, its demise has remained unacknowledged,

perpetuating the illusion of peace while Israel continues to impose new facts on the ground which make the establishment of a Palestinian state increasingly impossible.

Against this background, I will briefly focus on a number of aspects that I consider the basis for a political review of this phase. First, there is Israel’s non-compliance with the peace process or the implementation of the Oslo Agreement according to the agreed-upon stages. The transitional phase ended in 1999, and final status negotiations regarding Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, and water should have started. Twenty years have passed and Israel not only has not withdrawn but has actually carried out a major incursion into all West Bank cities, designated as areas A, during 2002–2003, killing more than 1,500 Palestinians, injuring thousands, demolishing many houses and displacing their residents, and destroying the infrastructure and government institutions in many West Bank cities; it continues to uproot trees, bulldoze cultivated lands, and causes major losses at both the individual and governmental levels. Israel then besieged the late President Yasser Arafat, whose poisoning remains a mystery even today!

Settlement expansion policies have continued and accelerated despite the Oslo Agreements. In 1996, close to 309,000 settlers lived in the occupied Palestinian territories; by 2017, the number of settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem had reached some 607,000. Israel has built bypass roads that connect settlements but isolate Palestinian cities and villages from each other, fragmenting the Palestinian social fabric and forcing thousands of Palestinians to live with limited access to their communities. Israeli checkpoints impede economic development and force Palestinians to waste their time waiting to pass through them. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “By the end of 2016, there were 572 fixed movement obstacles, including 44 permanently staffed checkpoints, 52 partially staffed checkpoints, and 376 roadblocks, earth mounds, and road gates. More than 100 additional obstacles, including 18 permanent checkpoints, segregate part of the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron city (H2) from the rest of the city.”<sup>ii</sup> Whereas Palestinians aspire to freedom and independence, Israel built the Separation Wall that has de facto annexed more lands, isolated Jerusalem from its Palestinian environment, and prevented West Bank farmers from accessing their lands. The West Bank has been entirely separated from the Gaza Strip, which has been placed under a tight siege ever since Israel’s unilateral withdrawal in 2005.

THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE TURNS TWENTY





## The demise of the so-called peace process is obvious, yet...

the International Criminal Court (ICC) against President Trump over his decision to recognize united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the US embassy to Jerusalem. In addition, the state of Palestine has joined a number of international organizations. Furthermore, solidarity movements and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement are expanding continuously. Yet, whereas these successes are important and their continuation can contribute towards strengthening the status

It has launched three wars against the Gaza Strip, destroying four-fifths of its infrastructure and causing full or partial destruction of some 17,800 homes.<sup>iii</sup>

Israeli policies have set consistent and long-term objectives accompanied by a solid official and popular position towards any future solution, particularly in terms of East Jerusalem. In line with its objectives, Israel has established facts on the ground and convinced its allies to tacitly accept its position. In fact, President Trump's so-called deal of the century – which is largely consistent with the Israeli position towards Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees – can be seen in this context. President Trump's declaration that the United States recognize Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel; his moving of the US embassy to Jerusalem; his vetoing<sup>iv</sup> of the UN Draft Resolution that objected to continued settlement

building, called on all states to refrain from moving their embassies to Jerusalem, and was endorsed by the remaining 14 member countries of the UN Security Council<sup>v</sup>; as well as his cutting US aid to UNRWA, constitute practical steps to remove three key issues (namely Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements) from the agenda of any future negotiations. He is thereby undermining the two-state solution in order to satisfy Israel's ambitions in the region.

These events and the ensuing Israeli policies with increased house demolitions, settler attacks on Palestinians,<sup>vi</sup> and expansion of settlements have shocked Palestinians both on official and popular levels. The dream of establishing a Palestinian state seems out of reach now, particularly in view of the events in the Arab world where a number of countries are preoccupied with

Gazans have gathered in the Great March of Return every Friday since March 30, 2018, to protest against the occupation. Photo courtesy of *Filistin Ashabab*.

their internal conditions, sectarian conflicts, and socio-economic problems created by ISIS, while others are rushing to normalize relations with Israel in the absence of a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Arab countries are turning their backs on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and are united in portraying Iran as the enemy. These developments have pushed the Palestinian leadership to intensify the international diplomatic efforts where significant successes were achieved: The number of countries that recognize Palestine has risen to 138, important resolutions in support of the Palestinian question have been issued at the UN General Assembly, and numerous condemnations of Israeli measures against the Palestinian people have been voiced. The Palestinian leadership has resorted to

of the state of Palestine, they are insufficient in terms of confronting the Zionist project.

There is a need for increased popular, governmental, and international efforts towards two goals: First, we must end the ongoing internal division in Palestine that has been in place for the last 11 years, unify the Palestinian people, strengthen popular resistance, consolidate unity of action and political partnership, and devise generally agreed-upon plans of action that contribute towards progress in the realization of the national rights of our people. This includes the need to conduct presidential and legislative elections as well as elections for the Palestinian National Council where we must aim for a minimum of 30 percent representation, each, for women and youth, since they are viewed as the main drivers of change. The absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council has largely contributed towards

strengthening individualism and marginalizing the role of civil society organizations. Furthermore, there is an absence in terms of the popular role in proposing laws and endorsing the decrees that are issued by the president for legislation that was proposed by civil society organizations through PLC members. These should be discussed and approved by the Legislative Council as appropriate and stipulated by the Basic Law. In addition, the government must be held accountable for the budget, its approval, and the extent to which it is implemented, and controls must be devised to minimize corruption within state agencies and NGOs.

Second, we must reiterate that the basic principles of human rights and the Geneva Conventions should be upheld, as they assert a people's right to self-determination and its right to struggle for freedom and independence, as highlighted as well by the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Through their struggle against the Zionist policies, our people have proven that they are determined to end the occupation and achieve their legitimate rights, be it through the hunger strikes of Palestinian prisoners who wish to highlight their humanitarian needs and protest against administrative detention, or through the recent Al-Quds/Jerusalem protests against the Israeli authorities' use of metal gates at the entrances of Al-Aqsa Mosque, or in the struggle of Al-Khan Al-Ahmar's community

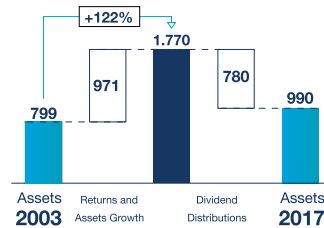
that continues to remain steadfast against its possible demolition and the displacement of its residents.

In line with international law, the Palestinian Declaration of Independence stipulates the right to freedom, equality, and non-discrimination based on gender as well as social justice for all, regardless of religion or race. Allowing for civil liberty and for the freedom of expression in PA-controlled areas encourages initiatives and strengthens the role of citizens to be able to confront the occupation. A free society in which citizens enjoy a minimum level of dignity can remain capable of realizing its desired victory through steadfastness and perseverance.

*Born in Jerusalem, Zahira Kamal is a Palestinian activist and politician. She has served as the minister of women's affairs in the Palestinian National Authority and coordinator of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee; she was also general director of the UNESCO project, Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre. Ms. Kamal is a board member of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, the Women's Studies Centre – Jerusalem, and the Palestinian Businesswomen's Association. She is the general secretary of the Palestinian Democratic Union.*

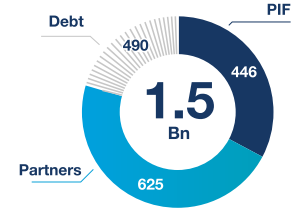
*Translated from Arabic by Areej Daibes*

PIF asset growth and dividends since inception (USD million)



PIF's total distributions to the Palestinian treasury totaled \$780 million  
125% of invested capital

PIF's Partner Network 2006-2017 (USD million)

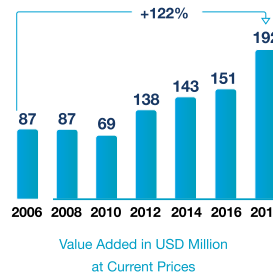


PIF originates and invites investors at the development stage, thereby de-risking projects

PIF reduces its share as investments mature, thus promoting private-sector ownership

Capital leveraged by PIF has contributed to economic growth and job creation in Palestine

~1.4%  
GDP Contribution 2017-2006



Jobs Supported

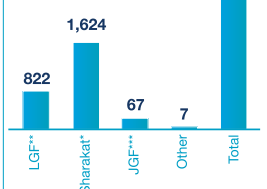
New Jobs Created from 2006 to 2017



Directly, Indirectly  
and Credit Platforms

SMEs Supported

SMEs Supported  
from 2006 to 2017



\* Includes Asala SME portfolio  
\*\* Loan Guarantee Facility  
\*\*\* Jerusalem Grants Facility

<sup>i</sup> Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Israeli Settler Population 1972–2006*, available at [goo.gl/N98f9F](http://goo.gl/N98f9F).

<sup>ii</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, *West Bank: Movement and Access*, December 2017, available at [goo.gl/kXqd1M](http://goo.gl/kXqd1M); OCHA lists the presence of 705 Israeli checkpoints in *Humanitarian Bulletin: Occupied Palestinian Territories*, September 2018; and B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center on Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *List of military checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, updated June 2018, available at [goo.gl/jGP85j](http://goo.gl/jGP85j).

<sup>iii</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, *22,000 people in the Gaza Strip still internally displaced from the 2014 hostilities*, April 5, 2018, \ available at [goo.gl/4zUsLa](http://goo.gl/4zUsLa).

<sup>iv</sup> Laurel Wamsley, "U.S. Vetoes U.N. Security Council Resolution Voiding Trump's Jerusalem Move," *National Public Radio*, December 18, 2017, available at [goo.gl/TFd1fa](http://goo.gl/TFd1fa).

<sup>v</sup> UN General Assembly Meetings Coverage, "General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Asking Nations Not to Locate Diplomatic Missions in Jerusalem," December 21, 2017, available at [goo.gl/Cn97xc](http://goo.gl/Cn97xc).

<sup>vi</sup> OCHA, *High level of violence by Israeli settlers; rise in Israeli fatalities*, November 2018, available at [goo.gl/XNP1mJ](http://goo.gl/XNP1mJ).

Impact KPIs



GDP Contribution



Trade Deficit Reduction



Investment Leveraged



Investment in Area C



SMEs Supported



Jobs Created



# Palestinian Information Technology @ 20



By Yahya Al-Salqan

The history of the last 20-some years of IT development in Palestine overlaps with the history of the Palestine Information Technology Association (PITA), the organization that serves as the voice of Palestinian information, communication, technology, and startup companies. For this reason, we will frame this article around the history and achievements of this organization. Twenty years ago, PITA and most of its member companies showed what can be achieved with little experience and despite a lack of competitive products or strong solutions. Today, PITA has more than 180 members in the West Bank and Gaza that offer their services not only in Palestine but also in the region and beyond; their specializations include software development and services; hardware sales and distribution; telecom, including the mobile operators; Internet service providers; and consultation companies. Twenty years ago, the IT sector had neither an efficient structure nor the leadership to represent and lead the sector. Today, the IT private sector is indisputably represented by PITA and has a wealth of experience with a mature sector that contributes up to 7 percent of the GDP; its rich portfolio of companies provides a wide spectrum of products, services, and intellectual property that ranges from enterprise solutions to banking software and fintech products, mobile applications, health informatics, and

government and legal solutions, to name just a few. Furthermore, PITA member companies are providing and exporting their service to world-class companies worldwide. Microsoft's Cortana, the speech-based interface of Microsoft's mobile operating system, was developed in Ramallah. The Intel Small Business Advantage (SBA) solution, of which Intel was able to sell more than 40 million copies worldwide in one year, was developed and is being maintained by Palestinian engineers. Many other similar projects have been executed by Palestinian software companies to the benefit of Cisco, hp, Fujitsu, Adobe, Nokia, and Oxford University – to name but some. Companies in Chicago and Cincinnati have their development



work to a company in Gaza. A tech hub in the city Rawabi is gaining recognition day after day, as is the Techno Park at Birzeit University.

Twenty years ago, it was almost impossible for any company, startup or otherwise, to receive or even consider the option of seeking funding. Today, at least four different funds are ready and actively looking for ideas and companies in which to invest.



centers in Ramallah and Nablus. A call center in Ramallah provides services to many clients in the United States and in Europe. Hi-tech startups are mushrooming around the country and provide Middle Eastern countries with services in Arabic that range from hotel reservations to real estate profiling and investment assistance, as well as health and medical education. A taxi management and reservation system and service, similar to Uber but for taxis, is gaining ground. A hi-tech smart-meter solution that converts any traditional utility meter into a smart one without changing the meter itself is being designed in Al-Bireh. European-based clients are outsourcing their business processes, back-office data entry, and digitizing

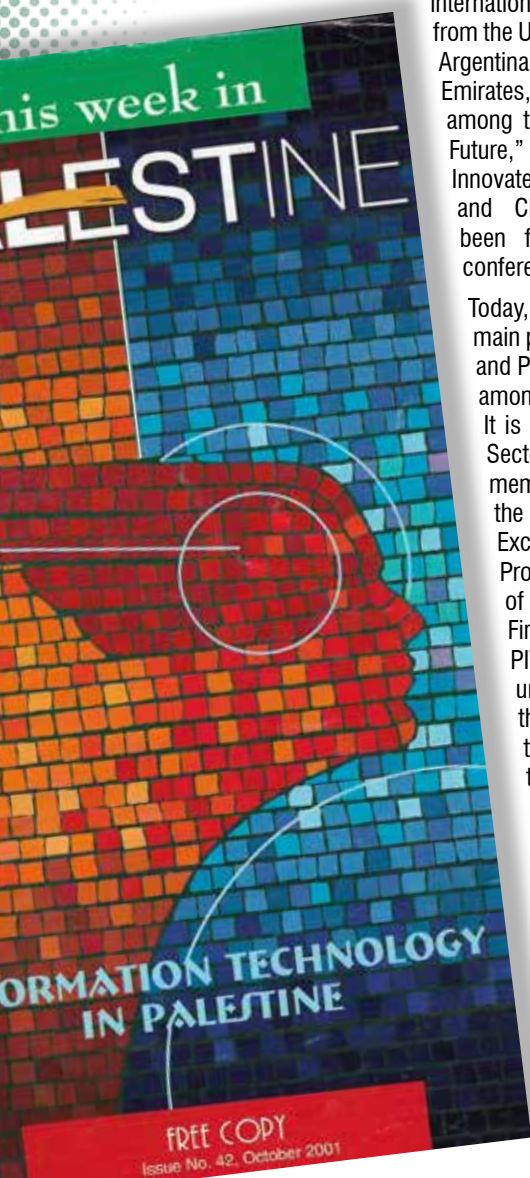
Incubators and accelerators are competing to host entrepreneurs and providing work spaces, mentoring, seed funding, training, and marketing services. Cafés are busy brewing espresso cups and serving young engineers and businessmen and women who are searching for better business opportunities or in the process of starting a new business. The Palestinian ICT Incubator PICTI stands out as the most experienced; it specializes in ICT and is the only incubator that has been operating continuously in both the West Bank and Gaza over the past 14 years. We should note, however, that the number of espresso cups that were brewed is much greater than the number of new businesses established.



THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE TURNS TWENTY

ExpoTech technology week, PITA's main annual activity, is undeniably and unequivocally the premier economic event across all sectors in Palestine. Last September, PITA successfully finished its fifteenth ExpoTech International Conference edition with an emphasis on "Better Future through Innovation." ExpoTech 2018 featured panel discussions and presentations on the role of innovation to shape the knowledge-based economy; the international cooperation to open new markets leveraging the well-established and well-deserved outsourcing reputation that our companies have earned; the role and status of the telecommunication and Internet infrastructure that Palestine enjoys despite all the challenges and pirating imposed by Israeli illegal penetration and exploitation of the Palestinian mobile market; and the advances of fintech and mobile and blockchain technologies and their challenges and solutions as well. Blockchain technology was explored throughout the ExpoTech conference and featured not only as a technology but also as an opportunity for Palestine to reserve its position as a regional blockchain hub. Expotech 2018 enjoyed an increasing international presence whereby presenters from the United Kingdom, the United States, Argentina, Kuwait, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, France, Japan, and India were among the conference speakers. "Better Future," "Smart Palestine," "Palestine Innovate," "Smart Cities," and "Mobility and Cloud" are themes that have been featured in previous ExpoTech conferences and exhibitions.

Today, the ICT sector is recognized as a main player in the Palestinian economy, and PITA plays a strong and active role among the private-sector organizations. It is an active member of the Private Sector Coordination Council, an active member of the board of directors of the Higher Council for Innovation and Excellence, a member of the Export Promotion Council, and a member of the Technical Committee on Financial Inclusion, to name a few. PITA will continue its effort as an umbrella organization of more than 180 specialized companies to promote the ICT sector, aiming towards building a knowledge-based economy, fostering the innovation ecosystem, and opening more markets to our products and services regionally and internationally. We may not be a "startup nation," but for sure we are a nation with a pool of engineering talents that are hungry and eager to contribute to the international civilization.



To increase support for ICT development and in intense coordination with the Palestinian Investment Promotion Agency (PIPA), PITA has engaged in efforts to approve an ICT-Sector Incentive Package. The incentive package has been put into action and is providing tax incentives for startups and well-established companies based on their human talent as a major asset and investment indicator. Any Palestinian company that invests in research and development

and employs new staff may be eligible for tax incentives, a move that aims to increase the company's employability and innovation. While there have been times when different opinions prevailed, the harmonious relation with the Ministry of Telecom and IT (MoTIT) has proven very effective as well. Thus, the elimination of the 7 percent tax burden that was imposed on the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) is a concrete successful example of such mutual partnership with the MoTIT.

	20 Years Ago	Today
Number of Companies	35	180+
VCs and Funds Available	None	4
GDP Contribution	2.5%	7%
Number of University Graduates Per Year	800	3,000
Export	None	Tens of companies are providing outsourcing services to international clients
Internet Penetration	5% of homes	40% +

*Dr. Yahya Al-Salqan is the chairman of the board of the Palestine IT Association of companies – PITA, chairman of Palestine ICT Incubator-PICTI.StartUps, and CEO and co-founder of i-Jaffa.Net – a leading software development company. Dr. Al-Salqan is an Internet security and blockchain expert with nine internationally (USA, EU) registered patents. Before starting Jaffa.Net Software, he worked as senior engineer at Sun Microsystems in the Silicon Valley- USA. He chaired six IEEE international conferences in the United States (at MIT and Stanford), Korea, and Tunisia, and published more than 50 refereed articles. He has been an invited speaker at many international conferences (RSA, JavaOne, IEEE COMPSAC). He has a BSc in electrical engineering from Birzeit University, an MSc from The American University, Washington DC, and a PhD in EECS from The University of Illinois. He enjoys painting and modern art in his free time.*

#### From our readers

*Your publication is phenomenal. It really takes cultural journalism to another level. I think its archive will be an important reference for all Palestinians for generations. Much respect. ... [Suggesting to duplicate the experience in] maybe Amman/Beirut/Cairo?*

*Good luck and thank you again. Just brilliant to see someone paying attention to quality and high-level content in a commercial world where Kim Kardashian dictates policy!*

**Dr. Ramzi Khamis** – London – June 4, 2018 (email)



# Al-Quds: The Indigenous Jerusalem

Palestinian Tourism Organizations  
during the Past 20 Years



By Raed Saadeh

One day during August 2001, Ariel Sharon decided to close the Orient House in an attempt to end any PLO-related activity in Al-Quds (Jerusalem). Along with this decision, a number of other representative organizations were also closed based on the pretext that they were funded by the Palestinian Authority, hence, according to the Israeli government, in violation of the agreements of the Oslo Accords. This included the Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was established in 1936, many years before the creation of the State of Israel, as well as the Higher Council for the Palestinian Tourism Industry.

Needless to say, neither organization was supported by the Palestinian Authority beyond the natural, historic relations that link family members together. The Higher Council for the Palestinian Tourism Industry office in Al-Quds was raided and closed down, preventing any access to its files, promotional materials, furniture, computers, or tools.

The higher council was one of the very first efforts to create an umbrella platform to represent the interest of tourism development in Palestine. It operated



Photo by George Azar

as a professional representative committee and had a director and other staff who served its strategy and coordinated the undertakings of its seven active and legally registered member organizations at the time. These were the Arab Hotel Association, the Tour Operators' Association, the Arab Tourist Guide's Union, and the representatives of the tourism transport companies, the souvenir shops, the airlines, and the tourism restaurants. Indeed, some of these organizations were stronger and much more active than others, but the general spirit at the time was to move forward as needed in providing the technical assistance for the individual organizations. This initiative was mainly supported by the GIZ, German Cooperation, called GTZ at the time. One of the main investments of this endeavor was to create the joint council of the tourism industry, essentially advocating for a public-private partnership (PPP) between the tourism industry associations and the newly formed Palestinian

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in order to enhance and consolidate all the administrative, organizational, promotional, and professional efforts invested in enhancing Palestinian tourism.

But in fact, the Israeli decision to close the higher council only contributed to a reevaluation and a shake-off of the weaknesses inherited in the initial process. In its first round, the joint council had reached a deadlock for a variety of reasons. The invested efforts, however, led to a more mature and more involved second phase. The lack of support for the next steps took its toll on the weaker tourism organizations. Essentially, only three of them emerged as the future leaders of the Palestinian tourism industry, namely, the associations or unions that represent the hotels, the tour operators, and the tour guides. At one point during this transformation, the tour operators' association split into two specialized organizations. The Palestinian Society of Tourist

THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE TURNS TWENTY



Built in 1897 by Ismail Musa Al-Husseini, the Orient House has served many diplomatic functions over the past 120 years. Photo by George Azar.

and Travel Agents (PSTTA), which represented most of the outgoing and ticket-sales business, and the Holy Land Incoming Tour Operators Association (HLITOA) emerged. The latter joined the hotels and the guides associations in creating the Higher Council for the Palestinian Tourism Industry, which basically included the three main representatives of the industry. The tourism restaurants failed to establish a body to represent them; the airline companies pulled most of their representations on the Palestinian side; most of the tourism transport activists grew to become incoming tour operators in their own right and hence joined the HLITOA; and the souvenir shops kept mostly to themselves.

One of the most evident achievements of the tourism organizations council was its ability to keep close ties and unite efforts with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, specifically with the then deputy minister and later minister of tourism and antiquities, Dr. Khouloud Daibes. Together they formulated the draft bylaws of the Palestinian tourism board and the basis for the tourism

law update. After many months of deliberations and preparations, when the bylaws of the tourism board were ready, the Palestinian government and the prime minister's office turned down the request to establish the tourism board PPP platform and only authorized the establishment of an advisory board for the minister. This advisory committee had no authority and no legal or professional structure. It merely brought insight and support to the minister and enhanced ad-hoc coordination between the public and private sectors.

Nevertheless, this phase produced an interesting by-product. The tourism bylaws allowed for the inclusion of any tourism sector that could properly represent a certain specific specialization related to tourism. This essentially opened the doors for the creation of the Network of Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (NEPTO), which represented the interest of community-based development in Palestine. NEPTO advocated for a new partnership model that called for a stronger presence and representation of the civil society organizations in tourism

and cultural heritage preservation. The PPCP model (public-private civil society partnership) enhanced community-based tourism as a vital tourism sector and encouraged related organizations to seek NEPTO's membership. NEPTO joined the advisory council of the minister of tourism and later implemented a number of interventions that forged the shape of the current dynamics of the tourism sector. It brought under its umbrella a number of community-related tourism initiatives, alternative tourism groups, rural and cultural heritage festivals, fair trade and local-products organizations, wildlife and environmental associations, and architectural heritage centers. All of NEPTO's twenty organizations shared the passion to work with Palestinian communities across Palestine, hence shedding light on a great deal of forgotten richness and micro Palestinian identities in infamous as well as in lesser-known destinations that had the potential to strongly differentiate the national tourism offer. NEPTO became the leading

**Over the past twenty years, Palestinian tourism has strived – amidst numerous obstacles – to allow visitors to enjoy comprehensive and profound experiences. Palestinian innovation and creativity have contributed to laying the foundations for competitiveness, effective management, and internationalism.**

umbrella to add value to and advocate change in Palestinian tourism through its research and innovation-based strategies.

Meanwhile – and especially following Sharon's visit to Al-Aqsa and from the consequent outbreak of the second Intifada until 2010, the year when the Oslo process seemed to have ended in the minds of many people and organizations – major changes took place that affected the shape and dynamics of tourism. The Israeli wall around the city of Al-Quds suffocated its lifeline and fragmented its economy and its social structure and changed its compass and aspirations. The subsequent wars on Gaza, particularly the war in 2014, had a detrimental effect on tourism in general and on Al-Quds in particular. The overall result of this transformation was the loss of half the Palestinian hotels in Al-Quds which, unable to withstand the high expenses while running on tourism fumes, had to close down, most of them never to reopen again. Thirty percent of Al-Quds Old City shops also



**Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is a unique destination, present in the hearts and minds of most visitors long before they make their first trip to the city. The Palestinian tourism industry is engaged with creativity and perseverance in expanding its organizational capacities and transforming its tourism-management strategies in Al-Quds and elsewhere to move Palestine towards a brighter future.**

closed their doors. The cultural scene diminished, and the number of cultural events declined considerably. In the meantime, Bethlehem and Ramallah, specifically, grabbed the glamour that Al-Quds had enjoyed before all the divisions and fragmentations that Israel and the current political situation imposed on the city. This led to the formation of a number of Al-Quds-based tourism initiatives, such as the Jerusalem Tourism Cluster, which is leading a strategy to reclaim the central value of tourism and culture in the city and to enhance its indigenous cultural heritage identity and potential. Al-Quds possesses many resources and capacities that are not utilized in its tourism portfolio in particular or in Palestine in general.

This bottom-up approach, which crystalized in the creation of a number of cultural-heritage and tourism initiatives, has realized worthwhile successes in other parts of Palestine as well. Bethlehem has an active consortium to enhance the positioning of the city. Masar Ibrahim has created

an internationally renowned path that connects Palestinian communities along a 33- kilometer trail. Among others are the Sufi Trails and the centers of local culture of the Rozana Association, shedding light on many of the lesser-known potential destinations in Palestine. Other ideas and investments ensued, such as the interpretation and narrative centers in the projected micro destinations as well as specializations, clustering, local production, environmental protection, and local leadership and governance structures to foster the management of local resources and capacities. This has brought many lesser-known destinations to light, such as Arraba, Sebastiya, Deir Istiya, Bani Na'im, Battir, Rashaydeh, and others. It has also attracted discerning interest in the other Palestinian cities such as Al-Khalil (Hebron), Nablus, and Jenin.

The profile of tourists visiting Al-Quds has also changed in the past years due in part to easier access to visas and entry permissions. In the past ten years, a growing number of Russians and other Eastern Europeans have been visiting the city. There are also rising numbers of Chinese, more Australians, and generally fewer Americans. What is interesting is the growth of the Islamic market particularly in Al-Quds as it is their primary destination. Actually, Islamic tourism has contributed significantly to the protection of many hotel establishments as well as other services in and around the Old City, saving them from having to close their doors permanently. This is a vital notion to understand, and we must investigate the potentials and limitations particularly as a great deal of Christian pilgrimage has been absorbed by Bethlehem. Yet Islamic tourism is still considerably new and fragile; it has its own challenges and needs to be carefully managed by the Palestinian tourism industry.

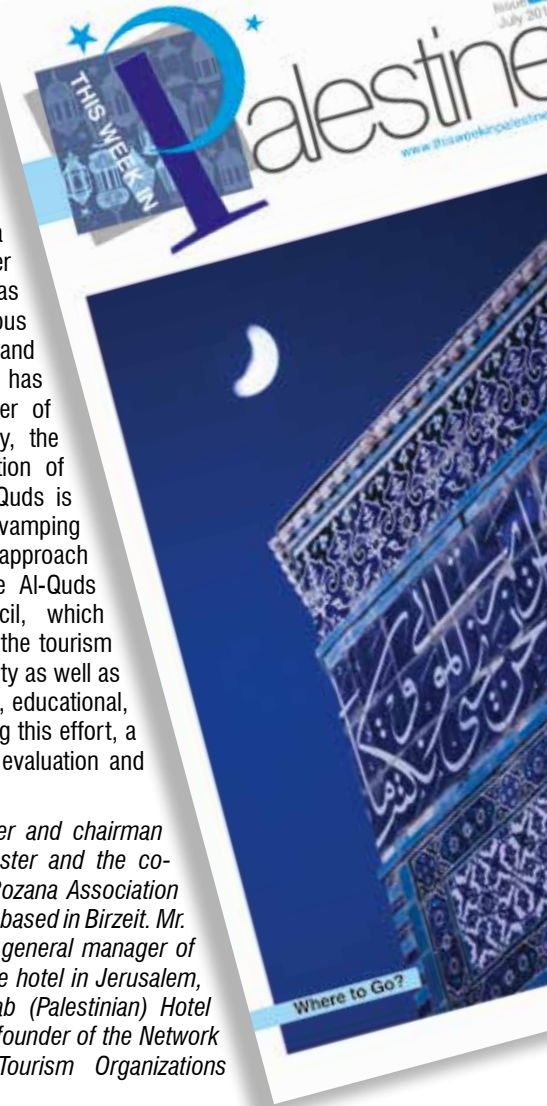
The bottom-up approach and the trend to build local destinations are what will define the emerging character of tourism development in the near future. Ms. Rula Maayah, the current minister of tourism and antiquities has been supportive of the various community-based tourism and cultural-heritage initiatives and has welcomed the growing number of new destinations, the diversity, the richness, and the transformation of the national tourism offer. Al-Quds is undergoing a destination revamping and will probably lead a new approach to tourism management. The Al-Quds Tourism and Heritage Council, which includes under its umbrella all the tourism organizations that work in the city as well as representation from the cultural, educational, and CBO sectors, will be leading this effort, a strategy that remains pending evaluation and review.

*Raed Saadeh is the co-founder and chairman of the Jerusalem Tourism Cluster and the co-founder and chairman of the Rozana Association for Rural Tourism Development, based in Birzeit. Mr. Saadeh is also the owner and general manager of the Jerusalem Hotel, a boutique hotel in Jerusalem, a former president of the Arab (Palestinian) Hotel Association (AHA), and the co-founder of the Network for Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (NEPTO).*

#### From our readers

*I caught you, you TWiP publisher  
You made your reader a prisoner  
By willfully and intentionally equip  
This magic booklet of yours called TWiP  
With relevant stories, that drew his cheers  
For a period that lasted, till now, twenty years.  
With best regards to you, to all members of your staff, and to TWiP,  
**William Alonzo** – August 25, 2018 (email)*

*There are very few remaining symbols in our small world that remind us of the possibilities. TWiP is one of them.  
**Carol Sansour** – November 1, 2018 (email)*







**#HearMeToo**  
**END VIOLENCE**  
**AGAINST WOMEN**  
**AND GIRLS**



16 Days of Activism  
 against Gender-based Violence  
 takes place each year globally  
 from 25 November until 10 December



© UN Women

In Palestine, numerous actors have been commemorating the 16 Days of Activism every year to eliminate violence against women and girls

Please join us:  
 16 Days joint campaign in Palestine  
 "#HearMeToo: Voices against Violence"  
 is waiting for your participation



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 Instagram HearMeTooPal

Supporters of the #HearMeToo: Voices against Violence 16 Days of Activism joint campaign in Palestine



This joint campaign is taking place under the auspices of the Ministry of Women's Affairs

# Reviving and Reinforcing *O'neh*

Building Community Resilience in the Palestinian State



By Hani Y. Hindiyyeh and Widad M. Boukaileh

In the face of Israeli occupation, political turmoil, economic difficulties, and environmental stress, the Palestinian community is changing. To survive these threats, communities need to foster resiliency. That's where volunteerism comes into play. It supports resiliency by enabling individuals to work together to shape collective opportunities to deal with risk. It also provides a wider system of support for both individuals and the community as a whole.

Volunteerism, as a universal social behavior, is a critical resource for community resilience. Mutual aid, self-help, and reciprocity are important coping strategies for isolated and vulnerable communities. In the absence of wider provisions and services, volunteers can help marginalized groups meet their needs. Many of these people witness and experience firsthand the specific challenges facing their communities, so they are in the unique position of being able to identify and directly respond to these challenges. Volunteers are the thread that binds communities together. By sharing knowledge and skills, they enhance community resilience, bolster economic development, and build global networks.

Prior to the first Intifada, community support was built on *o'neh*, or volunteerism. Given the fragile context of Palestinian society today, this cultural trait needs to be reinforced and revived.

THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE TURNS TWENTY



Alaa Abu Ramadan is a 26-year-old national UN Volunteer in Gaza. She has been working with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs since May 2017, helping to prepare reports on the humanitarian situation in the Strip (UNV, 2018)

**The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. It works with partners to integrate qualified, highly motivated, and well-supported UN volunteers into development programming and to promote the values and global recognition of volunteerism.**

Committed and active volunteers are vital to support the public interests of their communities and fortify them in times of crisis.

UN Volunteers comprise both national and international professionals deployed with United Nations organizations. They help advance sustainable development, reconstruction, and peace, working closely with UN entity partners, including government institutions and nongovernmental organizations.

In the State of Palestine, 52 UN Volunteers have been serving during

2018 with UNDP, UNRWA, OCHA, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, UNESCO, UN WOMEN, and OHCHR, 30 of them Palestinian nationals. Bringing specialized expertise and skill, these UN Volunteers serve as education officers, community development officers, and geo info system officers, among others. UN Volunteers encourage the spirit of volunteerism throughout the State of Palestine and can always be counted upon to provide critical assistance during times of emergency and adversity.

Within the context of the Palestinian economy, volunteerism creates a framework for development that is based on a collective will to progress rather than dependence on economic incentives – a scarce commodity when economic stagnation occurs. The framework ensures that all members of society have the opportunity to utilize their skills to increase their own resilience and improve their livelihoods.





**The UNV program was established in 1994 in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is based in East Jerusalem and hosted by the United Nations Development Programme/ Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP). Since its inception, the UNV program has been instrumental in responding to the needs of Palestinian society.**



In order to create this framework and a culture of volunteerism, governments and other stakeholders need to endorse this service and provide non-economic compensation to volunteers. They can strengthen volunteerism in two ways: 1) by nurturing an ecosystem for effective volunteering; and 2) by forming partnerships that value

the community's own contributions. These efforts will ensure that localization processes under the 2030 Agenda build on the commitment and innovations of citizens everywhere. Local volunteerism must be included in national policy planning and promoted by mainstream development strategies.

**I joined the UNV program because I was seeking an opportunity that would allow me to grow as a person and as a Palestinian woman, enhance my knowledge of the realities Palestinians face, and most importantly, provide a way to effectively contribute to my community. My UNV assignment is at OCHA with the oPt Humanitarian Fund, supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians. Working with OCHA's HF has allowed me to see firsthand the immense effort that goes into providing lifesaving and life-sustaining activities to the most vulnerable Palestinians living under occupation."**

Dalia Bitar, UNV Humanitarian Fund assistant at OCHA.

All community members, each with his or her particular capacity, have a responsibility to give back in order to develop and support the resilience of the community in which they live. And it is up to institutional stakeholders to build an enabling environment for volunteerism and direct the capacities of volunteers. In this way, Palestine can turn *o'neh* again into the impactful development tool it used to be.

**Every year on December 5, the world celebrates International Volunteer Day (IVD) to recognize volunteers worldwide. Special focus is on local community volunteers who contribute to making their communities more resilient against natural disasters, economic stresses, and political shocks. Local volunteers, of whom 60 percent are women and marginalized groups, embody the values of volunteerism and are acknowledged on IVD for their contributions to building more resilient communities.**

**This International Volunteer Day, join the United Nations Volunteer program in celebrating the contributions made by volunteers in all walks of life. This year, the UNV program in the State of Palestine will be launching a one-year campaign with the theme: Volunteers Build Resilient Communities.**



*Widad M. Boukaileh, UNV Palestine programme assistant, has more than ten years of working experience in nonprofit-organization management. She holds a master of business administration degree from Birzeit University focused on business administration, management, and operations.*

*Hani Y. Hindiyeh, UNV Palestine programme analyst, has more than 17 years of work experience, including 13*

*years spent with UNDP/PAPP working on Good Governance and Economic Empowerment programs. He holds a master's in international cooperation and development (MICAD) from Bethlehem University and a diploma in innovation and entrepreneurship from Bogazici University (Turkey), and has participated in the International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) in the United States.*

## From our readers

*It's a pleasure to see a publication of such caliber that underscores community concerns, analyzes national issues, provides political insight, and promotes the arts all the while steering away from partisan and political affiliation. If this is not true nationalism, I do not know what is. To top this, the publication is published with unparalleled professional graphic design.*

*The articles in this edition are first class. Salim Tamari's is brilliant and so is yours as it documents on both personal and national levels the narratives of the various initiatives and cultural activities in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and elsewhere; simultaneously underscoring the challenges of the occupation. I was touched by your humble apology at the end of the article for "those young men and women who were involved in the various initiatives but not acknowledged here." As usual, you demonstrate class and humility that is often missing in our narratives.*

*"Today an orchestra, tomorrow a state," what a beautiful message of hope on which to end the article.*

**Rami Meo** (to author Samia Khoury), Sydney Australia – June 1, 2017

*May your stamina and determination for Palestine's future grow and take hold worldwide.*

**Rizek and Alice Abusharr** – January 30, 2017 (email)

*I am honored [to contribute an article]. I am very familiar with the magazine for several reasons, and I think it is exceptional.*

**Mary Nazzal Batayneh** – March 6, 2017 (email)

*A sincere thank you to you, Sani, as you are becoming the pulse of the country.*

*All best wishes to you and to every sincere person.*

*Thanks,*

**Reem Masrouji** – October 1, 2017 (email)

*You keep proving me wrong.*

*After each edition I say, "This is the best edition."*

*Well done.*

**Rami Meo** – October 1, 2017 (email)

*This is an issue to keep in the house library.*

*Very well done.*

**Rania Filfil** – October 1, 2017 (email)

*This Week in Palestine is one of the few sources for consistent, up-to-the-minute information about the lives of Palestinians. It is invaluable.*

**Harold Knight** – September 1, 2018  
(message on TWiP's Facebook page)



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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year



# The Environment and Development in Palestine

## Harmony or Discord?



By Ramzi Sansur

In 1995, UNCTAD published “Environment and Development Prospects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,”<sup>1</sup> an article that detailed various parameters that affect the environment in the Palestinian territories. This was the first visionary study that correlated the status of the environment with prospects of development. The study aimed to assist the PNA in understanding the environmental situation at the time and to create a development plan to tackle the various issues highlighted by the study. It was one of many studies that UN agencies commissioned in various sectors to help guide the PNA in its efforts to build a modern viable state. Unfortunately, the Oslo agreements were not applied by Israel, which spoiled much of the Palestinian plans to control the land and its resources, delegating much of the development activities to the overcrowded Area A that is under “full” Palestinian control. The 1995 UNCTAD study predicted this unfortunate situation that severely handicapped the Palestinians in their efforts to achieve their goal of building a modern state. These predictions may not have pleased many, but they were visionary and have proven to be correct.

THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE TURNS TWENTY

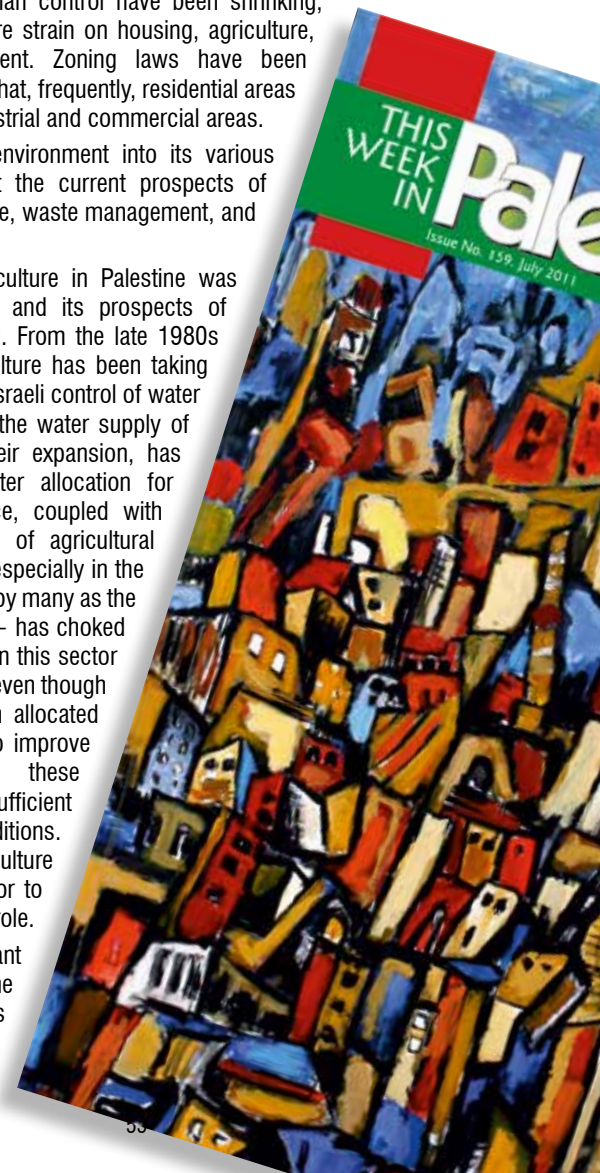
The biggest problem lies in priorities: As in many developing countries, the environment takes second place to economic development. In Palestine, moreover, Israel as the occupying power plays a major role in decisions that deal with environmental issues, especially in the more than 60 percent of the country that is classified as Area C. This area could have been the breathing space for Palestine, providing room for the expansion of housing, industry, public parks, and environmentally protected areas. Instead, Area C has become the hub for Israeli settlement and industrial activities that proceed without much regard for the environment. Thus, what would have been wildlife refuges have been transformed into Israeli housing developments and industrial parks, crisscrossed by a network of roads — an enormous infrastructure that is necessary to provide the settlements with the required materials but which has a negative impact on the environment.<sup>ii</sup> A simple drive through the West Bank is enough to convince even a casual observer of the severity of this situation. And the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been sidelined in any decision-making in Area C.

The areas under Palestinian control have been shrinking, which has placed a severe strain on housing, agriculture, and industrial development. Zoning laws have been scrambled in such a way that, frequently, residential areas are intermingled with industrial and commercial areas.

Let us now divide the environment into its various components and look at the current prospects of development for agriculture, waste management, and urban planning.

In the early 1980s, agriculture in Palestine was in a state of expansion and its prospects of development looked good. From the late 1980s onwards, however, agriculture has been taking a major downturn due to Israeli control of water resources that prioritizes the water supply of settlements and, with their expansion, has increasingly reduced water allocation for Palestinians. This practice, coupled with the ongoing confiscation of agricultural land in the West Bank — especially in the Jordan Valley, considered by many as the breadbasket of Palestine — has choked agriculture. Development in this sector has been depressed, and even though larger budgets have been allocated for this sector in order to improve agricultural production, these measures have not been sufficient under such difficult conditions. Nevertheless, agriculture remains a large contributor to GNP despite its shrinking role.

There have been important positive developments in the use of pesticides, thanks to better regulations, improved inspection,





and, more importantly, increased awareness among the general population and the farming community in particular of the risks associated with the improper use of pesticides. In line with international regulations, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture strongly regulates which pesticides are allowed into the market. The list of permitted pesticides is updated regularly, and certain pesticides are either banned or their quantities and modes of use are highly regulated.

A number of plans to manage many types of waste that include sewage, solid waste, and industrial waste have been implemented by the PA with the generous help of donors. In a few success stories, sewage treatment plants have either been implemented or are in the process of being finished. The treatment of wastewater, however, remains an important issue to be tackled.

Solid waste management has witnessed success stories and setbacks. The management of solid waste requires the construction of

sanitary landfills. But most potential locations for sanitary landfills are located in Area C, which is managed by Israel, and solid-waste disposal projects in this area require Israeli permission that has been difficult if not impossible to come by. The most extensive example is the German-funded Solid Waste Management project for the governorate of Ramallah. Tens of millions of Euros were spent on feasibility studies and planning, but eventually the project was rejected for multiple reasons. Israel insists that any such projects in Area C must receive their environmental approval. The Israeli government and the PA are in agreement that such projects must protect water resources and wildlife. But even when studies have been approved by the Palestinian side, Israel has always found a way to reject them. One sticking point is that Palestinians refuse to allow Israeli settlements to use such sites, as such permission would constitute an acknowledgement of the settlements which Palestinians, and the international community,

The wastewater from the settlement flooded large areas of Khan Al-Ahmar lands, as settlers attempt to aid their government in its drive to force the village residents to leave. Photo courtesy of Middle East Monitor.

consider illegal.<sup>iii</sup> As a result, solid waste is poorly managed, with most localities resorting to the use of random unregulated dumps where the waste is burned, which causes untold damages to human health and the environment.

Industrial waste and waste from workshops is poorly managed as well and frequently incinerated, emitting all sorts of toxic fumes and leaching into the environment. In order to comply with regulations for the environmental management of toxic waste, some of the industries send, or used to send, their waste to the waste treatment facility in the Negev. However, such attempts have faced major obstacles due to Israeli regulations that restrict the movement of waste from Palestine to Israel, the reluctance of specialized Israeli companies to handle waste that originates from Palestine, and the high fees they charge in cases when they do agree.

**Water supply, sewage treatment, and solid waste management, as part of environmental management, have been sidelined – at the expense of environmental preservation.**

Regarding the vast topic of urban development, I shall highlight only a few points. Most municipalities have the proper regulations to control urban development because in the past few years, much attention has been given to this subject in workshops or through sponsored tours to foreign urban areas. There is now an improved understanding of how proper urban development can better serve the people. The pressures that are exerted on the municipalities by population growth and increasing urbanization, however, are tremendous and are forcing towns and cities to expand their boundaries – which cannot be done without Israeli approval. Thus, municipalities have to try to make the best of the areas they control, but they may not always be successful.

Regulating traffic, for example, is a nightmare in all urban areas. But we must take into consideration that not all land area is under Palestinian control, such as the case in Area C and to some extent also in Area B. And the tendency of some Palestinians to knowingly ignore regulations exasperates the situation in the localities where the fines are not sizable enough to serve as a deterrent.





Shuhada Street in Hebron. Palestinian residents have installed nets to keep the garbage that settlers who live above throw onto the street below. Photo courtesy of Palestine Image Bank.

Urban development in Palestinian areas within the so-called green line is no better. You cannot have proper development and preserve the environment under a brutal occupation that considers all of historical Palestine and beyond to be the land of Israel, gifted by God, but at the expense of the local populations, historically and today.

Unfortunately, the final victim of development policies is frequently the environment, with all the negative consequences that follow and that are becoming increasingly evident: Polluted water resources and drying aquifers, streams, rivers, and lakes. Air pollution is increasing in Palestinian urban areas – and imported from the large cities in Israel's coastal region

due to the prevailing western winds. And what about nuclear waste? I leave it to readers to use their imagination to respond to that question. Is it not public knowledge whether it is secretly dumped in Palestine or Israel? Or is it clandestinely being exported?

*Ramzi M. Sansur, a former professor at Birzeit University, holds a PhD in environmental health and toxicology from New York University. He has applied his knowledge and expertise to raise awareness among rural and urban communities in Palestine and the region through various environmental campaigns, demonstration projects, and practical field and laboratory work. He can be reached at [rmsansur@hotmail.com](mailto:rmsansur@hotmail.com).*

<sup>i</sup> Ramzi Sansur, "Environment and Development Prospects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," UNCTAD/ECDC/SEU/8, April 1995, available at <https://unctad.org/en/Docs/poecdcsud8.en.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Whereas cars and lorries with yellow Israeli plates can cross checkpoints with ease, transportation for Palestinian companies frequently faces obstacles through checkpoints and roads they may not use, forcing them to be prepared for long delays or alternate routes.

<sup>iii</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, *Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan*, October 2016, available at [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/SG\\_Report\\_on\\_Israeli\\_A.71.355.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/SG_Report_on_Israeli_A.71.355.pdf).

#### From our readers

*Thank you for giving me a heartfelt smile each time I receive an email from you. In the midst of people losing faith and enthusiasm, you've managed to maintain an inspiring attitude. Warmest wishes for a very happy next year to all. With love and gratitude,*

**Laila Atshan** – December 30, 2017 (email)

*This issue [April 2017] makes me proud to be a Palestinian, waiting for the day when our people will be free and independent, leaving a bigger mark on the Arab world and indeed the whole world.*

*Warm congratulations and all good wishes,*

**Rizek and Alice Abushar** – April 22, 2017 (email)

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a Happy New Year from



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## Gaza - Twenty Years Later



By Mkhaimar Abusada

The Gaza Strip, which is located on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, is no more than 365 square kilometers with two million people. Population pressure has been critical in an area with limited water and arable land, weak infrastructure, (e.g., roads, sewage system, and electricity network) and many internal and external barriers that have resulted from the Israeli siege and blockade, which has turned it into the largest open-air prison in the world.

The first issue of *This Week in Palestine* coincided with the golden days of Gaza in 1998. At that time, Gaza was the center of Palestinian politics after the signing of the Oslo Agreement in September 1993, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994. Gaza was promised by the international community to be the Singapore of the Middle East. Within a few years, Gaza's infrastructure began to develop, the economy was booming, and above all, there was greater accessibility to the outside world. The Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt was open 24 hours a day all year long. In 1998, the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat inaugurated the Gaza International Airport. Flights from Gaza to Cairo, Amman, Cyprus, and other countries connected Gaza with the outside world. The Gaza seaport that was under construction when the Intifada erupted was swiftly destroyed later by Israel.

The outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000, and the ensuing violence

and armed resistance against the Israeli army and settlers in Gaza triggered massive Israeli retaliation against infrastructure and the economy, and above all, completely destroyed the newly inaugurated Gaza International Airport and restricted the movement within and in and out of Gaza.

The heavy financial and military toll of the second Intifada pushed Israel to withdraw unilaterally from Gaza in September 2005. Israel claimed that Gaza was no longer under occupation, but it locked the gates of Gaza; and a year later, after Hamas kidnapped the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Israel instituted a tremendously restrictive siege and blockade against Gaza from all directions – land, sea, and air – leaving Gazans frustrated and desperate.

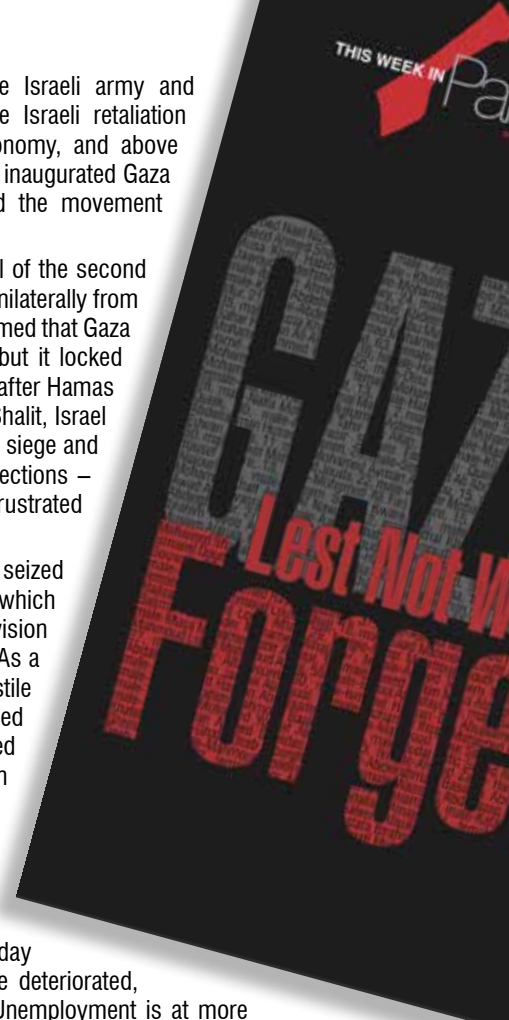
Things became worse after Hamas seized control of Gaza in June 2007, which marked the beginning of political division between the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Israel classified Gaza as a hostile entity in September 2007, and allowed the import of only badly needed food items to prevent starvation and humanitarian disaster in Gaza. The Israeli closure has steadily forced Gaza to become more and more dependent on outside aid for even the most basic items necessary for everyday life, and economic conditions have deteriorated, precipitating widespread poverty. Unemployment is at more than 40 percent, and UN figures put youth unemployment at critical levels.

The Israeli siege pushed Hamas and Gazans to construct tunnels that ran under the Egyptian border to bring in fuel, construction materials, and consumer goods. A new class of tunnel owners and smuggled businesses flourished in Gaza between 2008 and 2013. But in July 2013, the new Egyptian regime began a serious crackdown on the tunnels, causing shortages of many commodities in Gaza. Changes to Israeli restrictions on imports in 2010 after the Turkish flotilla resulted in a rebound in some economic activity, but regular exports from Gaza (e.g., agricultural produce such as citrus, strawberries, and flowers) and furniture are still not permitted. Standard-of-living measures in Gaza remain below the levels seen in the mid-1990s.

A United Nations report published in 2012 indicated that Gaza would not be livable in 2020, if the Israeli siege and blockade remained in force. According to the report, many Gazans are food insecure, due primarily to a lack of economic means rather than a shortage of food. Eighty percent of households receive some form of assistance from UNRWA, WFP, and other local and international relief agencies, and 39 percent of people live below the poverty line.

In addition to siege and closure, Gaza has come under three Israeli major aggressions (wars) between December 2008 and July 2014. The worst was

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**Gaza was once a thriving city on the Mediterranean coast surrounded by citrus groves and fertile fields. Today, Gaza is fighting for its survival and glory. Gaza's symbol, the phoenix, represents the multiple rebirths of Gaza on the same site over the past 5,000 years.**

in the summer of 2014, which led to the death of more than 2,200 people, many thousands injured, and massive destruction of civilian infrastructure and housing. Four years later, Gaza has not been completely rebuilt due to lack of international funding and continued Israeli restrictions on infrastructure materials.

However, the worst is yet to come. In April 2017, the PA instituted a number of measures that aim to put pressure on Hamas to give up its control over Gaza,<sup>ii</sup> further crippling the already extremely strained economy, after more than a decade under blockade, and push Gazans deeper into poverty and unemployment. But Gazans has survived the siege and PA measures by orchestrating a mass nonviolent protest along the fence between Gaza and Israel that began on March 30, 2017. The protest has led to the death of more than 200 Gazans, the majority of them civilians, and a handful of journalists, paramedics,

and persons with disabilities. The international community and Western human rights groups condemned the use of disproportionate force by Israel against Gaza civilians, but it did not stop Israel from targeting civilians.

The year 2017 marked 50 years of Israel's military occupation of Palestine and 10 years of Israeli siege and blockade of Gaza. With this grim milestone, many young people in Gaza consider Israel to be the source of their misery and suffering. The promised Singapore of the Middle East has turned into a nightmare for the Palestinians in Gaza. With unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment, and no future, the dreams of Gaza's youth have been shattered. Suicide, drug addiction, and the crime rate have risen remarkably in the past two years – a consequence of despair. The overwhelming majority of Gazans have lost hope for a better future in Gaza and are ready to switch gears and make U-turns. Hundreds of youth have succeeded in leaving Gaza for Europe, and many others are trying. But not all Gazans are able to leave.

The only way to save the shattered lives in Gaza is to lift Israel's siege and blockade and end the Palestinian internal political division. This might be the path to restore normalcy and create hope for a better future.

*Dr. Mkhaimar Abusada is an associate professor and chairman of the political science department at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. He has authored one book and many academic articles and short essays in local and internationally recognized newspapers and academic journals.*

<sup>i</sup> Shortly after Hamas won the 2006 elections that were deemed open and fair by international observers, the international community stopped supporting the Palestinian government. Hamas was boycotted and pressured by the Quartet, Israel, and the PA with the demands to recognize Israel and the Oslo Agreement and condemn terrorism. Hamas refused because it saw these concessions as the only bargaining points left at their disposal.

<sup>ii</sup> Hamas claims to be engaged in unofficial negotiations with Israel and rumors regarding discussion points range from humanitarian measures to the reopening of the harbor and even the airport. Israel denies these claims. The PA as the official recipient of financial support for Palestinians protests that Hamas does not have the authority to engage in such negotiations on its own.



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## Basel Zayed

Basel Zayed is a virtuoso oud player and acclaimed vocalist skilled in classical and contemporary Arabic music. He draws on extensive experience with the Maqam (Arabic) music tradition to explore the beauty and universality of Middle Eastern music, especially when combined with other musical styles, such as jazz. An experienced music educator with a background in music therapy, Basel holds a master's degree from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama at City University of London. He is also a trained pianist and skilled musical arranger. He has composed and arranged music for several successful artistic projects and performing groups. He also creates and records original soundtracks for movies, plays, and dance troupes. Basel has performed at many international music venues in various roles — featured artist, bandleader, conductor — in Sweden, Italy, France, Spain, Denmark, Lebanon, the United Kingdom, the United States, Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine.



Basel began his music career as a composer, vocalist, and professional oud artist in Palestine, and has developed a reputation as a successful musical leader and conductor. He has composed and performed with several groups, including Sanabel at Birzeit University, the First Ramallah Group, Yalalan, and Nawa. One of Basel's early contributions to contemporary Palestinian music was founding the group Turab ("Soil") in 2004. Through popular fusion-style compositions with lyrics based on the works of contemporary Palestinian poets, Turab has translated into music the complexities of politics, occupation, poverty, love, and daily life in Palestine.

Basel currently lives with his wife and two children in Massachusetts, where he works as an artist, clinician, and educator, and engages in a number of projects.



Ayn Trio performs Basel's unique instrumental string compositions (with Basel on oud/buzuq, Naseem Alatrash on cello, and Layth Sidiq on violin) that offer audiences a modern musical style that incorporates Middle Eastern musical heritage with a global perspective that highlights diversity. By seamlessly blending elements of Western musical arrangement with striking motifs of Mediterranean music, Ayn Trio realizes Basel's vision of uniting listeners from diverse backgrounds in a common musical experience.

Kharoub ("Carob") is an ambitious cross-cultural music project that combines Basel's original, modern Middle Eastern music with the Hamon Martin Quintet's traditional French Breton music. Soon after meeting in 2014 at the Palestinian National Theatre in Jerusalem, Basel and the members of the quintet realized that they shared a vision of bringing to life onstage their respective musical traditions for a global audience, et voilà — Kharoub was born. Since then, Kharoub has toured and performed Concert Palestine/Bretagne in various venues, most recently at the Temps Fête Festival, Festival de Bouche à Oreille, and other major festivals during the summer of 2018.

*Awweed* ("Oudist") is Basel's musical solo performance centered on the traditional style of Oriental music performance, featuring classical and modern heritage of Oriental music using oud, buzuq, and voice.

For more information, visit his Facebook page (Basel Zayed) or website ([www.baselzayed.com](http://www.baselzayed.com)), or listen to the playlist at [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLclUr6wmbESqLGw6ZqdLJGSWoCm9Fo5eV](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLclUr6wmbESqLGw6ZqdLJGSWoCm9Fo5eV).