



## **West Bank Consultations on the Future of Palestine**

### **Pugwash Report**

**Palestine  
7–8 June 2015**

On 7-8 June Pugwash conducted consultations regarding the future of Palestine and current policy options. The exercise was organized with the intent of better understanding the priorities of Palestinian political leaders and experts and included meetings with senior political figures in Ramallah, as well as visits to Hebron and some other sites in the West Bank. The present report is a summary of the main topics discussed, prepared by the rapporteurs.<sup>1</sup>

### **Summary**

The consultations identified that the occupation is the first and foremost concern of Palestinians, especially in the light of the statements of the new Israeli government and the continued political separation between Gaza and the West Bank. There were also different views regarding the prospects for the reconstruction and opening up of Gaza. Finally, much hope is attached to the internationalization of the Palestinian struggle for statehood.

## **REPORT**

### **1. Ending the occupation is the number one priority for Palestine**

- The Israeli occupation has been described as the ‘source of all evils’ for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians feel that finding a political solution to end the occupation will enable the economic and political development they crave.
- The expansion of settlements in the West Bank is leaving the Palestinians with only a fraction of the land that had been assigned to them by the Oslo Accords. While estimations vary, settlements cover between 60–65% of Area C, which is under Israeli security and civilian control. A settlement freeze is urgent and necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> The rapporteurs for this report were Roberta Mulas, GEM Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctoral Candidate at Warwick & LUISS and Poul-Erik Christiansen, Projects Assistant, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Please note that the views presented here represent a range of opinions expressed in the meeting, and they do not necessarily reflect the personal views of the rapporteurs, nor of the Pugwash Conferences as an organization; however, a large majority of the participants was from Palestine, and this is reflected in the views contained in this report. The meeting was held according to traditional Pugwash/Chatham House rules to enable an open exchange of perspectives and exploration of creative possibilities for ways forward. Thus, the substance of the discussions can be reported out, but no item discussed can be attributed to any one individual. There was no attempt to seek consensus, and in fact the sharing of diverse views was encouraged.

- The impending demolition of the village of Sussiya is an example of the wider trend towards relocating communities to make space for Israeli settlements.
- Simple statistics of the land grab do not reflect the variety of methods of control used by the Israeli state which impact the lives of Palestinians: among others, withholding permits for construction, work, and travel, as well as restricting movement and access to water, sanitation, and electricity.

## **2. A two-state solution is made less likely by the political situation in Israel**

- The new Israeli government was viewed to be even less forthcoming than the previous one in engaging in a peace process. Moreover, it is seen as purposefully attempting to block the emergence of a Palestinian nation state.
- At this time, bilateral negotiations with Israel were not seen to be a viable route for success.
- Among Palestinians, hopes for a two-state solution are completely lost because the pace of the settlements expansion leaves no land to create a Palestinian state.
- Time pressure makes this scenario akin to ‘negotiating on how to share a pizza while one is eating it slice by slice’.
- There are conspicuous concerns that even a one-state solution would not guarantee the rights of the Palestinian population (as was the case for colored people under Apartheid South Africa).

## **3. The reconstruction and opening up of Gaza are hindered by several factors.**

- The current situation in Gaza is tragically worrying for everyone. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities compound the damages still visible from the war of the summer of 2014. Moreover, the lack of rights for Palestinians from Gaza was said to be an exasperated version of the daily situation lived by Palestinians from the West Bank.
- The reconstruction and opening up of Gaza should be delinked from the reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas. While national unity is important, humanitarian cooperation on the ground should be encouraged even while political differences remain.
- Reconstruction cannot happen without opening up the Strip. The border crossings of Erez and Rafah are crucial to allow Palestinians more authority in letting people and goods in and out of Gaza. Furthermore, an important strategic proposal could be the creation of an independent seaport (and possibly the reconstruction of the destroyed airport). Israel, however, is not seen as forthcoming to any proposal for opening up Gaza. An international campaign to induce a different Israeli attitude should be considered. Every effort should be made to avoid the possible next war by Israel on the people of Gaza.
- Reconstruction should be seen not only as a humanitarian problem but also a political one, given the power that comes with appointing contractors. At the same time, every delay in reconstruction means loss of major business opportunities. The jobs that could thus be created might reduce the rampant poverty and unemployment in the Strip, which in its current state is a breeding ground for radicalism.

#### **4. Attention is given to the international dimensions of the Palestinian national project**

- Palestinians in Ramallah harbor great hopes in the international non-violent initiative to obtain statehood recognition through political, diplomatic, and economic pressures. The boycott, divest, sanction (BDS) movement is seen as an integral component of that project.
- Following its welcome accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, further measures to establish Palestine's image as a state should be encouraged; for example, by joining important arms-related treaties like the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.
- It was recognised that Palestinian success depends also on establishing a narrative of victimhood to compete with the well established Israeli one. All acts of violence undermine such prospects.
- There was a strong feeling that Europe has a responsibility in helping Palestine to be recognised as a legitimate state, as Palestinians feel they are 'the victims of their victims'. Moreover, in light of the increasing favour of European public opinions and Parliaments towards the Palestinian statehood, European governments should be encouraged to listen to their publics.
- Other external players, particularly those with strong links with Hamas, might play a useful role, especially where it concerns the rise of Daesh around the Sinai and Gaza Strip.
- A regional dialogue on nuclear safety should be started to underscore the shared nature of the threat posed by nuclear facilities, such as Israel's ageing Dimona site.
- Pugwash was urged to hold a Track 2 meeting in Brussels with EU member states that have recognized Palestine in order to assess progress and devise future common policies.
- Pugwash was also urged to continue to hold meetings related to these topics, and to raise these issues regionally and globally.