HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP

This chapter of the Palestinian Human Development Report (PHDR) focuses on human development indicators. It should be noted from the outset that even the most rigorously collected quantitative data, while significant, may fail to reflect a complete picture of actual conditions existing within the society. Data sometimes show progress in certain specific areas addressed by the human development indicators, but may still not fully capture the whole social context. The qualitative dimensions of indicator analysis are very rarely addressed in research studies and data they provide. International and local indicators used in the field of human development cannot alone provide a true representation of the special conditions that exist within Palestinian society. Those special conditions methodically destroy Palestinian society’s innate potential to achieve any significant levels of sustainable human development at the macro level and in the long term.
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2003 Human Development Report includes a classification of nations of the world according to a predefined human development index, which includes: average life expectancy; adult illiteracy rates (15 years and older); educational levels whether primary, secondary, or post-graduate; and GDP per capita (estimated using average purchasing power in US dollars). The UNDP 2003 placed the Palestinian territories among nations enjoying an average or mid-level of human development, equal to Turkey’s and ahead of China, Iran, Algeria, South Africa, Syria, Morocco, India and Egypt. It occupied the 98th position among 175 countries included in the classification. Seeking to set quantitative standards for measuring “human development” – which is defined as an expansion of human choices – tends to marginalize the concepts of freedom, equality and justice.

It is in fact difficult to comprehend an expansion of human choices that does not also include an expansion of individual and collective freedoms, of equality between individuals and peoples, and higher levels of social justice. This index reduces human development to mere indicators that do not reflect reality, where freedom and development opportunities are quashed and where social justice is imprisoned. It does not fully account for circumstances and conditions that hamper development of human rights and freedoms. Therefore, the Palestinian territories were placed, on the Human Development Index, at the same level as countries such as Turkey and China, and higher than great nations that have been independent for decades and that possess enormous capacities and resources.

The reality in the West Bank (East Jerusalem included) and Gaza Strip is an environment characterized by continued occupation, colonization, and land confiscation; methodical and deliberate destruction of PNA institutions; thousands of deaths, tens of thousands of injuries and several thousand prisoners; hundreds of demolished homes; a quasi-paralyzed dependent national economy; partitioning of Palestinian territories into small isolated strips; roadblocks and closures; and the construction of a Separation Wall to further isolate regions.

These conditions, many of which have prevailed for decades, have most recently resulted in doubling the percentage of Palestinian families living under the poverty line and an exponential increase in unemployment rates between 2000 and 2003. Inexplicably, the Human Development Index increased from 0.70 to 0.731 between 1997 and 2001. This increase implies an improvement in human development processes in the Palestinian territories, which in fact fails to reflect the true situation on the ground.

This quantitative distortion is due to the intellectual bases used to establish the Index. Such bases are situational. They focus on what can be quantified and ignore political dimensions, as they do not take the relationships of power into consideration (whether they are local, regional or international), abuses and restrictions on freedom of choice and the growth and continuance of unequal relationships at various levels. These bases deal with societies as organic, independent entities, completely insulated from the consequences of the surrounding international or regional systems and from distortions in the military, economic and diplomatic power balances among different societies. Furthermore, they either ignore or fail to take into consideration the differences within society itself.

The current PHDR presents measurement alternatives and proposes additional indicators that provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation.
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**SECTION ONE: INDICATORS SPECIFIC TO THE PALESTINIAN CONTEXT: AN INTRODUCTION**

Any thorough analysis of the human development situation in Palestine must consider the following sets of indicators: collective indicators related to the Palestinian cause, social indicators, economic indicators, human indicators, demographic indicators, educational indicators, health indicators, and gender indicators.

2-1-1 Collective indicators related to the Palestinian cause and the collective rights of Palestinians, wherever they might be, including:

- The extent to which United Nations principles and resolutions related to Palestine are implemented, including Resolutions No. 242 and 338, and resolutions concerning the right to development, the right to self-determination and refugees.

- The Palestinian society’s level of sovereignty, which is measured by presence or absence of an occupying power and the relief of the population, the land within borders, and a country’s natural resources from external military and political control.

- Measurement of the effect of continued occupation on daily strategic and practical decisions that need to be taken by Palestinians, whether on the individual or institutional level. Therefore, the total withdrawal of the occupation forces would be a prime indicator of Palestinian development status.

- The extent of Palestinian society’s ability to secure international support, whether official or unofficial. This ability was affected by international events that led to the rise of the US as the world’s single largest power as well as the acceleration of the “war against terrorism” and its consequences on national liberation movements. These consequences have left nations and their people doubting the credibility of concepts in which they once firmly believed, such as the legitimacy of resistance to occupation and the universal importance of certain values, such freedom and independence. Nevertheless, international expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people have grown stronger and more capable of confrontation, especially on the ground. Volunteers from abroad actively demonstrate against Israeli policies, especially those regarding closures, roadblocks, and the Separation Wall. They also played an important role in protecting the headquarters of the late President Arafat during the Israeli siege of his compound. They also organize solidarity campaigns for the Palestinian people within their own countries, in addition to their local activities in Palestine.

2-1-2 Social and Political Indicators:

It is normal for social development indicators to be affected by the political environment and by changes within the Palestinian economy, with unemployment and poverty rates soaring and dependency on local and foreign aid increasing. Continued violence, weak and poorly organized security forces incapable of executing their duties properly, and the gap between society and its executive, legislative and judiciary institutions have all played a role in the regression of social indicators. Among such indicators:

The total withdrawal of the occupation forces would be a prime indicator of Palestinian development status.
Tribal protection networks strengthened during the past four years. Tribal affiliations and protective networks played a much larger role in providing assistance and support to needy families, defusing individual conflicts and limiting occurrences of crime. Such a result would usually be viewed as positive. Unfortunately, it demonstrates in fact a backward step in the authority and effectiveness of central government institutions and an indicator of weakness in their operations. It actually destabilizes the foundations of any future Palestinian state and contributes to a deterioration of the infrastructure of Palestinian civil society, which had been gradually built up during the last several decades.

In recent years, Palestinian society found individual and collective solutions to its problems. It protected itself and resisted a slide into the abyss of internal violence, crime and chaos. Palestinian society survived against all odds; in the absence of any central organizational or problem-solving source of leadership, and in spite of the pressure exerted by the chronic state support to secular and leftist democratic trends decreased.

Point of Lights 16-19: Coping Mechanisms within the Palestinian Society

One of the most significant examples of empowerment in Palestine is the mobilization of Palestinian self-reliance, in a manner that enhances a collective ability to stand firm in the face of the occupier. Self-reliance may well be one the most important aspects of Palestinian empowerment, reflecting the Palestinians’ creative and successful approach to a constantly changing set of negative circumstances. The following examples illustrate adaptive developmental situations within Palestinian society in previous years:

- **Point of Light 16 – Self-sufficiency through Organic Agriculture:** The idea behind this initiative is based on the development of land reclamation practices and chemical-free agriculture using local resources alone. The initiative was launched by a Palestinian returnee, who had decided to live and invest in his homeland. The project expanded within five years to include animal husbandry (cows, sheep and poultry), and the venture’s revenues fully covered his family’s needs and expenses. He was even able to start marketing his produce within the local community.

- **Point of Light 17 – Rabbit Farm Prototype in Al Shawkeh Village:** The particular relevance of this developmental initiative, implemented by the Rural Woman Development Society (RWDS), resides in the fact that it provides a model for working with poor rural women, one of the most marginalized segments of Palestinian society. One of the RWDS’s biggest accomplishments was to identify available skills within the community and evaluate the needs of these women in order to create appropriate projects. Women were involved in all of the project’s stages, from implementation to marketing the final products. The pilot rabbit farm was built at the end of 2003 with very limited resources (approximately $7,000). It now has 92 productive rabbits. The whole project is conducted under technical and medical supervision to safeguard project assets and to maximize production. (The capital investment is expected to be fully recouped within 2 years.)

- **Point of Light 18 – Union of Agricultural Relief Committees (Savings and Lending Program):** The Savings and Lending Program initiative allows small group of rural women to pool their savings, and then periodically offer micro loans to union members from the pooled capital for purposes related to the development and empowerment process within the community. The Union of Agricultural Relief Committees now has 5065 members in 12 separate savings and credit associations. The micro loans are most often used to finance women’s education and training needs, or to provide start-up capital for micro businesses within the community.

- **Point of Light 19 – Union of Women’s Social Work Committees/ Women’s Psycho-social Counseling Center (Job Creation Program):** This project provides training in the production of handcrafts to poor women, and then purchases the handcrafts produced for resale.
of dysfunction and a total lack of any social impetus for unity and cohesion. Notwithstanding the fact that data indicate an increase in violent crimes, these rates remain far less than what would be expected by psychologists and sociologists from any community forced to endure similar pressures. Palestinian society’s deeply rooted civic tradition and its strong internal unity contribute to steadfast adherence to core values and a sustained focus on the one key social issue: ending the occupation and achieving Palestinian freedom and independence.

The Palestinian human experience is manifest in the capacity to maintain self-control, relationship management skills, family, professional and social cohesion, a set of basic civil services consistently provided by government institutions, local voluntary support of poor families, poverty alleviation programs, and support from relatives and friends abroad.

- Increasing factionalism within Palestinian political environment, and decreasing support to secular and leftist democratic trends: The contemporary history of the Palestinian revolution, represented by organizations such as the PLO and its sub-factions, has been characterized by the fact that it adopted a revolutionary proactive stance with regard to the separation of religion and state, and prohibited the use of religion as a pretext for political and financial gain. Palestinian officials sincerely embraced the notions of religious tolerance and the need for peaceful coexistence of all religious identities within Palestinian society.

- Empowerment programs designed to support marginalized groups contributed to an evolution in the social standings of women, youth, children and the handicapped.

- Empowerment programs designed to support marginalized groups contributed to an evolution in the social standings of women, youth, children and the handicapped. These groups are now more readily able to assert themselves as result of numerous programs which provide training, raise collective awareness and build internal capacity. These achievements represent significant advances on the road to empowerment, but empowerment will never be fully realized without fundamental changes in society’s economic, social and cultural structures, which ultimately determine the extent to which marginalized groups will benefit. Full empowerment demands the removal of obstacles to growth found within these structures and their external manifestations (in legislation, cultural

On the opposite side, especially during the past four years, the popularity of conservative religious trends increased sharply, particularly in Gaza, while the authority of secular democratic perspectives declined. Conservatism has grown not only within Palestinian society, but in all Arab nations and the world in general. Thus, religious agendas moved to the forefront in political and social decision-making processes and in future development planning.

This trend towards overt religiousness is expected to pose new challenges to any political authority, both at the ballot box and in military, financial and institutional arenas, where the trend has already gained a significant foothold in recent years. The spread of religious conservatism is also expected to exert a negative impact on recent advances in the areas of democratic governance, individual and collective freedoms, women’s rights and foreign affairs, particularly in relations with the developed nations of the West. The popularity of the Fatah movement, PLO’s largest faction, continues to decline, and progress towards democratization in governance is haphazard. Fatah’s authority and influence in legislative and local councils is on the wane as the demographics of these groups increasingly reflect the trend towards religious conservatism.

Empowerment will never be fully realized without fundamental changes in society’s economic, social and cultural structures.
attitudes, religious belief and educational curricula) and the ultimate integration of these groups into the heart of development and decision-making processes.

Empowerment also requires active and effective participation in the decision-making process both inside and outside the scope of the family unit. At the same time, political and social commitment to equal opportunity is fundamental to the creation of an environment conducive to the active participation of marginalized groups in civic life. Empowerment necessitates major changes in the cultural framework of Palestinian society, which sometimes contributes to the social isolation and political marginalization of specific groups while reinforcing the authority of other groups.

- The crisis generated by the Palestinians’ plight and the resulting stress on society have lead to the entrenchment of a number of problems which require attention and resolution. Violence is present in every aspect of Palestinians’ lives in addition to the afflictions of unemployment and poverty, an underperforming and

Box 2.1: Problematic Legal and Legislative Issues

Despite efforts exerted in the interest of improving the quality of existing Palestinian legislation, some difficulties still hamper its evolution, i.e. loopholes, contradictory texts, or problems with application and implementation. This legislative disorder is due to several factors: the absence of a Palestinian constitution; a heritage of separate and often conflicting legal traditions; a weak judiciary system; and a general disregard for a common rule of law within society. The following examples demonstrate the legal quandaries inherent in some Palestinian laws:

The Handicapped Law No. 4 of 1999: Article 10.4.C. of the law stipulates that “government and non-governmental institutions shall be compelled to employ the handicapped in at least 5 percent of their staff positions, each according to the nature of its work, and to modify the physical premises in order to make it accessible to them”. This provision is in line with another set forth in Article 24 of the Civil Service Law No. 4 of 1998, which stipulated that “A totally or partially blind individual, or a physically challenged person may be appointed if their disabilities do not prevent them from performing the duties of the position for which they have been appointed, by virtue of a medical certificate issued by the competent medical authority, provided that they meet other health requirements”. However, the actual hiring procedure of the civil service recruitment authority compels job candidates to undergo medical examinations with very strict criteria, thus impeding the implementation of the two progressive laws and preventing many physically-challenged people from taking up public service positions.

The Palestinian Penal Code: One of the problems with this law resides in its traditional nature, which is at odds with human rights standards for issues relating to women’s and children’s rights, family violence and sexual aggression. Some examples include failure to provide special protection for children and to impose strict punishments for crimes perpetrated against them. The same applies to elderly people, women and physically-challenged individuals. A clear example of failure to provide special protection for children may be found in the provision of Article 208, which sets the legal age for marriage at 15 years for women. Fifteen years is still defined as part of childhood by the Palestinian Children’s Rights Charter; thus the established legal age for marriage for women is in direct contravention to the Children’s Charter. Palestinian law also contains no provisions related to family violence and domestic aggression, making it impossible to prosecute such occurrences as crimes.

Family Law: Although there are few provisions regarding women in the civil status law, those that exist are distinctly discriminatory. This is the case in the law’s definition of the “head of the family” as male and in provisions related to the declarations of marriages, divorces, births and deaths.

Decreases will occur in Palestinian life expectancy rates, school enrollment rates, and literacy levels, due to the continued decline in the economic situation.

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1 Bahauddin Saadi, Appointing Physically-challenged Individuals in Civil Service Positions, Periodical, Palestinian
unresponsive government infrastructure, and a general sense of insecurity due to checkpoints and dangers associated with highway travel. In addition, the trends are increasing towards uncontrolled population growth, high school drop-out rates, especially among females, rising crime, decreased concern for the environment, increasing instances of defective products dumped in the Palestinian market, continued monopolies in the fuel and communications markets, illegal constructions, and a rapidly deteriorating quality of life in small towns and villages due to increased pollution, noise and overcrowding.

- The collective negative impact of these factors will certainly affect human development indicators related to education, health and other social services. However, the effects of these conditions cannot be quantified instantly, as they all have significant incubation periods. Eventually, decreases will occur in Palestinian life expectancy rates, school enrollment rates, and literacy levels, due to the continued decline in the economic situation and the limited resources made even scarcer by the confiscation of Palestinian land and sources of fresh water, and exploding population growth among the poor.

2-1-3 Economic Indicators:

The Palestinian economy is unique in that it is completely dependent on Israel and can be virtually shut down by Israeli policies of border closure and inter-city travel restrictions. At present, the Palestinian economy is so battered that it is kept afloat by the financial largesse of donor nations. Up until 1994, the devastation of the Palestinian economy has led to the rise of two contradictory and simultaneous phenomena, namely individual enrichment and collective impoverishment. A condition of individual enrichment was created by a general improvement in Palestinian family’s disposable income, thus leading to above-average living standards according to world indicators. Paradoxically, at another level, collective impoverishment increased, as the Palestinian economy lost the capacity for independent growth and self-sustenance and its ability to provide employment and the basic necessities of life to its population. The subjugation of the Palestinian economy to that of Israel works to the latter’s benefit, as it solidifies its control over Palestinian natural resources and the labor force through the policies of occupation. The past four years, especially, have witnessed intensification of these adverse conditions, creating a new situation in which individual impoverishment and collective impoverishment are occurring simultaneously.

2-1-4 Human Indicators:

The military conflict and the continued occupation have resulted in the chronic suffering of victims living a never-ending tragedy. When discussing quantitative indicators that describe such victims, it is imperative to mention their broken dreams, their unaccomplished projects and their uncertain future. Therefore, in order to understand the true nature of the Palestinian condition, additional human indicators must be examined.

2-1-5 Palestinian Refugees2:

- Population conditions: Approximately 4 million Palestinians live as refugees in their country and abroad. Each and every one of them dreams of returning to his/her country, home and farm. In the West Bank and Gaza, the number of refugees has almost tripled, from 560,000 in 1950 to 1,562,192 refugees in 2003. Many of these refugees live in camps officially

Collective impoverishment increased as the Palestinian economy lost the capacity for independent growth and self-sustenance.

Refugees live in camps concentrated into an area that, if gathered together, would not exceed 20 square kilometers.

2 The section regarding refugees is a quote from: Anwar Hamam, Palestinian Camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and UNRWA’s Role in Empowering Refugees, background paper prepared for Palestine’s 2004 Human Development Report.
recognized by UNRWA. The refugee camp population in Palestine is distributed as follows: 176,514 refugees reside in 19 West Bank camps, and 478,854 refugees reside in eight camps within the Gaza Strip. The remaining 906,824 refugees live in towns, cities and unofficial camps scattered over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The dramatic population increase is generating extreme pressure inside the camps, intensifying poor living conditions already characterized by inadequate housing and limited or nonexistent social services.

- More than 1.5 million refugees live in camps concentrated into an area that, if gathered together, would not exceed 20 square kilometers. In other words, each individual refugee has an average of 32.8 square meters of living space. In view of the fact that the camps’ total square meters have not changed over time (the land on which they were built is rented by UNRWA), and that the number of refugees continues to grow, individual living space is therefore in constant decline. Hence, family homes within the camps are intensely overcrowded, and the situation is expected to grow worse. Families in which three members share one room represent 40 percent of the population in Gaza camps and 31 percent in West Bank camps. The average size of a refugee dwelling is 93.3 square meters for a family of 6.6 persons in the West Bank. The average refugee home size in Gaza is 107.9 square meters for a family of 7.8 persons.

- **Education conditions:** School registration rates in West Bank and Gaza camps are relatively high for primary school children. These rates begin to gradually drop as the students’ ages increase. According to UNRWA 2002 statistics, the number of schoolchildren enrolled in primary schools was 177,458, while enrollment dropped to 71,862 children in secondary level classes. The general average of female students rose to 50.6 percent, with 48.9 percent in Gaza and 59.1 percent in the West Bank.

- **UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Gaza are overcrowded in comparison with schools in other areas.** The average number of students per class in UNRWA schools is 43, with an average of 38.6 in the West Bank and 47.1 in the Gaza Strip.

- Furthermore, available data indicate that refugees living in camps are more educated than Palestinians residing in other areas. In fact, 11 percent of camp refugees reach post-secondary education, while this percentage only reaches 10 percent in cities and 9 percent in villages. The percentage of female refugees who complete their secondary education is 10 percent higher than among non-refugees. As for male refugees, the difference is only 5 percent higher. Forty-five percent of registered refugees have received at least ten years of schooling, compared to only 35 percent of those living in urban or rural areas finishing ten years of school.

- **The UNRWA financial crisis is affecting the performance of UNRWA’s teaching staff,** with workers striking and demanding better living conditions. The conflict between UNRWA administration and workers also impacts the study performance of students.

- **Health conditions:** UNRWA provides health services to refugees through its health centers located in all Palestinian camps in the West Bank and Gaza. These centers offer programs that focus on the health of babies, women and pregnant mothers. They conduct vaccination campaigns and provide medical services for the treatment of general diseases, in addition to supplying medication. Such centers refer serious cases to UNRWA hospitals or other contract-bound institutions. UNRWA covers 70 percent of the treatment cost. Fifteen percent of
UNRWA employees work in health-related fields. The agency allocates 18 percent of its budget to health.

Health conditions inside the camps are in a state of constant degradation. In general, the number of malnutrition cases rose during the Intifada and reached 22 percent among refugee children. Refugees’ psychological health also suffered under deteriorated security conditions. The situation is most apparent among children, who are exhibiting increased behavioral aberrations. Many have become more prone to violent behavior and suffer from bedwetting and chronic anxiety. Eighty-five percent of refugee parents have reported negative behavioral changes in their children.

2-1-6 Palestinian Prisoners:

- The report issued by the Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs on September 15, 2004 stated that the number of Palestinian prisoners now totals 5874 prisoners, distributed as follows: 630 prisoners from Gaza (10.7% of the total number of prisoners), 4824 prisoners from the West Bank (82.1%), 328 prisoners from Jerusalem (5.6%), and 92 prisoners from regions within the 1948 borders (1.6%), in addition to the 1400 other prisoners who have not yet been registered in the Ministry’s records. There are 15 prisoners who have spent more than 20 years in Israeli prisons and 409 prisoners incarcerated for more than 10 years.

- Among the total number of prisoners, there are 1893 detainees who have been tried and sentenced (32.2% of the total number), 920 common-law prisoners who have never been indicted (15.7% of the total number), and 3061 detainees awaiting trial or undergoing investigations (52.1% of the total number).

- Since the Al-Aqsa Intifada of September 2000, more than 300 female prisoners have been jailed, in addition to 3 female prisoners who already were in detention. One hundred nine female prisoners are still being detained, representing 1.8 percent of the total number of documented prisoners. The following figures describe the situations of the women currently held: 22 married prisoners, 18 mothers, and two live births in prison. Forty-one female prisoners have been tried and sentenced, 63 are detainees, and five are common-law prisoners. The total number of prisoners’ children amounts to 75.

- Data indicate that there are more than 150 detainees who have been in jail since before the Al-Aqsa Intifada who suffer very poor health. Some suffer from heart conditions, others from cartilage infections, while others suffer from acute arthritis and severely impaired eyesight. There are around 900 prisoners who are afflicted with chronic diseases. Some were arrested after being shot and did not receive appropriate medical care. Two detainees are hemiplegics.

- The report states that 99 percent of detainees have been subjected to torture, with 73 percent having been placed in freezers, 85 percent having been intimidated, 90 percent were forced to stand for hours on end, and 95 percent suffered from sleep deprivation, in addition to other internationally prohibited means of torture which are still commonly used against Palestinian prisoners.

- One hundred seventy-one prisoners have died in prison, 69 of those due to torture (40.3%), 34 from medical negligence (19.9%) and 68 homicides, prisoners who were deliberately killed during detention (39.8%).

Prisoners’ families suffer from greatly reduced living standards, as the majority of detainees are young people who were arrested since the beginning of the current Intifada.

The number of children arrested since the beginning of the current Intifada exceeds 2500 children below the age of 18 years.

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the primary breadwinners for their families. Beyond the economic dimension, there are many human aspects of detention that worsen the suffering of prisoners' families, such as the prolonged absence of a family member in a society where family ties are very strong; the psychological impact on the family of detention circumstances on such prisoners – hunger strikes, torture, etc.; the difficulty and sometimes impossibility of obtaining the right to visit your loved one in prison. Female members of prisoners' families usually bear the heaviest burden imposed by the loss of the family's main financial provider.

**Box 2.2: Palestinian Children: Victims of Detention and Exploitation in the Conflict**

All international conventions regarding human and children's rights emphasize the necessity of protecting children's lives and well-being. They also establish guidelines for children's affairs and for the protection of their freedoms. Nevertheless, these conventions are not observed by the Israeli occupation forces. The number of children arrested since the beginning of the current intifada exceeds 2500 children below the age of 18, of whom 391 are still under detention. More than 100 of them are below 16 years of age.

Children who are detained in Israeli prisons are being deprived of their basic rights, including arbitrary arrest, failure to advise them of the reason for their detention, depriving them of the right to contest the charges filed against them, in addition to enduring physical and psychological torture, especially during interrogations and in order to pressure them into working for Israeli security forces.

A former child prisoner stated: “The soldier asked me: Why were you throwing stones?” then he tried to scare me by yelling to his comrades: “Where are the sticks? Do you have a power outlet here? Are the dogs here yet?”… Then, immediately after that, he threw himself at me and I could feel his fists and heavy ranger boots kicking me all over my body.

Beyond that, the matter of recruiting children to work with Israeli security forces through pressure and intimidation is generating numerous legal complaints relating to children's rights in the Palestinian territories. Israeli authorities ignore international conventions which protect civilians and prohibit forcing them to collaborate with an occupying power. As for Palestinian resistance groups, they abide by their declared positions not to recruit children, considering that the current struggle against the occupation is a popular uprising and not an armed conflict between two armies. Hence, one cannot say that children have been forced to participate and hence, they may not be described as boy soldiers. In all cases, the issue of children remains problematic in this field.

**SECTION TWO – DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS**

The demographic issue is a top developmental and political priority, with an emphasis on fertility rates. Traditionally, fertility rates are integrally linked to culture. Researchers consider the high fertility rates in the Palestinian territories a result of social customs and tradition, both of which encourage large families and prefer early marriage for girls. Nevertheless, the bulk of development literature supports the theory that political stability, economic growth, expanded job opportunities and lower rates of poverty would simultaneously elevate the status of women in Palestinian society and slow the burgeoning rate of population growth. Moreover, a controlled population growth rate may be achieved through: a clearly established demographic policy in addition to political commitment on all

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7. For more information regarding demographic indicators, please refer to the publications of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, such as Statistical Monitoring of Social and Economic Conditions within the Palestinian Society, (First Quarter 2004), p. 17-19.
institutional levels; a wider understanding of the consequences of the current population growth; and institutionalized family planning in order to help Palestinian society realize its ambitions for development and guarantee an acceptable quality of life for future generations.

- Population size and distribution: The number of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, as of first quarter 2004, is estimated at 3,767,000 persons, of whom 1,909,000 are male and 1,858,000 are female — a gender ratio of 102.7 males for every 100 females. The geographic distribution of Palestinians is as follows: 2,385,000 persons in the West Bank and 1,382,000 in the Gaza Strip. Roughly 56.4 percent of the total population resides in urban areas, 28.5 percent in rural areas and 15.1 percent in camps.

- Population density: Population density in the Palestinian territories is considered to be high, especially in the Gaza Strip, which is ranked as one of the world’s most densely populated areas. In general, Palestinian population density in 2004 was estimated at 636 persons per square meter, with 428 persons per square meter in the West Bank and a staggering 3853 persons per square meter in Gaza. These wide statistical variations in demographics are due to the fact that Israel controls the major part of Palestinian lands, and persists in its land confiscation policy, building and expanding settlements, building ring roads, and most recently confiscating and isolating lands in order to build the Separation Wall.

- Low average age of the Palestinian population: The population pyramid shows that Palestinian society is a young society, considering the width of the pyramid’s base. Young people (below 15 years) constitute a high proportion of the population in comparison to other age groups. Data has shown that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are younger on average than those living in the West Bank. The percentage of children below 5 years was evaluated in mid-2003 at 17.8 percent (17% in the West Bank and 19.2% in Gaza). The percentage of individuals aged between 0 and 14 years was estimated, in the same year, at 46.1 percent of the total population living in the Palestinian territories (44.3% in the West Bank and 49.2% in Gaza). The same statistics indicate a drop in the percentage of individuals over the age of 65, who represent 3.2 percent of the Palestinian territories’ population (3.3% in the West Bank and 2.7% in Gaza).

- Fertility: Fertility rates in Palestinian territories are among the highest in the world, if compared to other similar countries, especially Arab countries. In 1999, the Palestinian fertility rate was 5.9 children per family, compared to 4.4 children per family in Jordan and 3.3 children per family in Egypt.

- Emigration: Statistical data indicate an increase in the internal migration rates in the years that followed the creation of the PNA. Internal migration during the first three years that followed the establishment of the PNA (1994-1997) rose to 29.1 percent as compared to an average annual rate of 17.2 percent between 1990 and 1993. In 1997, the rate of Palestinian individuals owning a permanent dwelling outside the Palestinian territories reached 10.5 percent of the total population, divided between the West Bank and Gaza at a rate of 65.3 percent and 34.7 percent, respectively. Results show that nearly half of those who came back from abroad came back after the creation of the PNA, and that 53.6 percent of them were males, while 46.6 percent were females.

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The reason behind the increase in the number of males returning is due to the fact that many male individuals came back without their families, in addition to the return of many single male Palestinians working or studying abroad. There are other indicators that show a decrease in the number of people coming back due to the harsh living conditions endured by Palestinian citizens. Some data indicate that the rate of returnees has dropped from 10 percent to 6 percent.9

Box 2.3: Palestinian Emigration Abroad

The results of the opinion poll conducted by the DSP (Survey 19, 28/09/2004), show that 5 percent of the survey sample declared that one of their family members had permanently emigrated from the Palestinian territories during the Intifada. Eleven percent declared that one of their family members had left the Palestinian territories for study or temporary work purposes during the same period.

- The percentage of surveyed individuals expressing a desire to emigrate has reached 18 percent (according to gender: 24% males and 12% females).

- Furthermore, results have shown that 25 percent of youth (18-27 yrs.) wish to permanently emigrate (27% males and 16% females), in addition to the fact that 37 percent wish to leave the Palestinian territories on a temporary basis, for work and/or study purposes.

- Results also show that readiness for permanent or temporary emigration is higher in Gaza than in the West Bank, with 21 percent of the Gaza survey sample expressing the wish for permanent emigration, compared to 16 percent in the West Bank. Furthermore, 43 percent of the Gaza sample wish to temporarily emigrate compared to 34 percent in the West Bank.

SECTION THREE: EDUCATION INDICATORS

2-3-1 Impact of Israeli Measures on the Education Sector in the Palestinian Territories

As was the case with all other sectors, the Palestinian education sector has suffered from Israeli aggression, with countless educational facilities closed or deliberately destroyed. From the beginning of the Intifada through May 2004, 1289 schools were closed and 282 schools destroyed. Education sector losses reached $5.2 million in primary and secondary schools and $4.85 million at the university level. There were 723 students killed during the Intifada, including 493 school students, 196 university students and 27 teachers, along with many thousands injured or taken prisoner.10

Despite these measures, and ever since Israel occupied the Palestinian territories in 1968, maintenance of high educational standards has constituted a major element of the Palestinian strategy to surmount the challenges of Israeli military occupation. Investment in

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the education sector remains a fundamental empowerment tool and provides a basis for sustainable development objectives in the Palestinian territories.

Within this vision, education has two aspects: material and moral. The first aspect is based on the fact that education improves Palestinians’ living conditions by opening doors to employment and reduces the economic consequences of their physical displacement. From the moral perspective, large numbers of well-educated individuals within Palestinian society provide some immunity against attempts to dissolve the Palestinian national identity and shred the Palestinian socio-cultural fabric. The Palestinian Human Development Report of 2002 asserted that education, learning and curricula were major pillars of emancipatory human development. It is certain that specialized institutions have taken major steps to safeguard the educational process and improve its performance.

Nevertheless, many issues are being raised with regard to the quality and type of education offered to students such as: To what extent has the Palestinian educational environment adopted the requisites of emancipatory human development? Does Palestinian education create a true sense of citizenship in the hearts of students? Does it produce good citizens possessed of the values of creativity, innovation, human rights, women’s rights, non-violence, scientific thinking, open-mindedness, tolerance, and the respect of personal opinions?

Education is a pivotal pillar of empowerment and for decades has served as major factor in ensuring Palestinian society’s capacity to face and overcome crises, both individually and collectively. Palestine’s overall schooling rates were the highest in the Middle East and North Africa. Despite the fact that Palestine occupies a

Box 2.4: The Separation Wall and the Educational Process

Completing the construction of the Separation Wall will have a negative impact on an estimated 170,000 students.

Completing the construction of the Separation Wall will have a negative impact on an estimated 170,000 students in 320 schools, who will be on the outer side of the wall, while more than half of them will attend schools located on the inner side of the wall. For example, there are 150 teachers and 650 students in the District of Tulkarem alone who have difficulty reaching their schools. It is expected that these numbers will increase dramatically once the wall is completed. The number still does not include those schools which have been damaged or will be demolished. Education costs for families will increase as students are forced to travel long, circuitous routes from their villages to their schools which will be located, once construction is completed, on the opposite side of the Separation Wall. Thus, a bad educational and economic situation will be made even worse.

Confiscation of land owned by the Al-Quds University in order to build the Separation Wall represents a clear example of Israeli aggression against Palestinian educational institutions. The decision was disapproved of even by the Israelis themselves. Students of Hebrew University issued a statement objecting to their government’s actions, and 30 professors, teachers and lecturers from Hebrew University took part in a sit-in organized at Al-Quds University.

Maintenance of high educational standards has constituted a major element of the Palestinian strategy to surmount the challenges of Israeli military occupation.
somewhat lower economic position among medium-income states, its educational performance is nevertheless advanced among countries of the same category.

However, the quantitative indicators showing high educational performance do not paint a complete picture of Palestinian educational reality, unless quality of education indicators is taken into account. Such qualitative indicators include curricula excellence indicators, the relationship between educational institutions and society, the quality of vocational and professional training received by teachers, the quality of educational methods and capacities, and levels of creativity and rational thought achieved by the education process.

Quantitative indicators showing high educational performance do not paint a complete picture of Palestinian educational reality, unless quality of education indicators is taken into account.

At the same time, others believe that educational institutions are seeking innovation, development and capacity-building among those who have made education their career, in addition

Point of Light 20: Continuation of the Educational Process despite the Challenges

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, along with other institutions responsible for the maintenance of primary, secondary and university level schooling, has demonstrated tremendous resilience in facing down the common practices of occupation. They created emergency plans to ensure the continuity of the educational process. Alternate schooling sites were set up in homes, mosques, and other community centers. Secondary school certificate examinations were held on time and universities and other educational facilities found ways to continue all activities.

These strategies proved to be very efficient in countering Israeli military aggression on Palestinian towns and urban centers, as well as the forced closure procedures and curfews. The Ministry and UNRWA have begun work on programs to remedy violence in schools. They are also working hard to integrate the concepts of human rights and gender equality into their curricula.

Some consider that the Palestinian educational system, in spite of its successful expansion to accommodate upward population trends, has not yet fully achieved its most basic task: i.e. preparing upcoming generations to meet the demands of the future. They believe the Palestinian educational system must adapt in order to expand each student’s ability to learn over a lifetime to make the development of the student the central focus of the education process, rather than rote learning.\textsuperscript{11}

At the same time, others believe that educational institutions are seeking innovation, development and capacity-building among those who have made education their career, in addition

Education, learning and curricula are major pillars of emancipatory human development.

\textsuperscript{11} For more information about this subject, please refer to Ramzi Rihan, Palestine and the Knowledge Society, in Knowledge Society and Development Capabilities, previous reference, p.99-106.

\textsuperscript{12} The official age for kindergarten enrollment is from 3 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months. As for children less than 4 years old, they attend kindergartens under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and which only attract 1% of children.

2-3-2 Public Schooling

Kindergartens

The kindergarten\textsuperscript{12} sector’s educational importance resides in the fact that it deals with children at a flexible and sensitive age, one at which children are particularly open to psychological, physical and mental development. However, in Palestine, this sector does not meet international norms and standards. Kindergartens lack curricular and educational programs designed to enhance children’s capabilities, creativity, and skills. Their programs are restricted to the processes of teaching children how to read and write. They do not know how to employ games as
learning tools (a standard practice throughout the world for this age group), and lack professionally trained preschool and kindergarten level educators specifically qualified to teach children of this age. At this age, Palestinian children are rarely recognized as independent persons ready for learning—a prejudice which negatively impacts educational and social development. Kindergartens are often considered as nothing more than day-care centers.

The number of pupils registered for kindergarten has decreased.

### Table 2-1: Statistical Indicators Regarding Kindergartens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Number/percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of kindergartens</td>
<td>847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of classes</td>
<td>2761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of educators</td>
<td>2668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of male kindergarten pupils</td>
<td>36,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of female kindergarten pupils</td>
<td>33,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of pupils</td>
<td>70,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment rate for both genders</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 2.5: Kindergartens – Forming the Future**

If, as stated in the previous chapter, empowerment requires investment in human beings in order to realize their full potential and creative powers, then this definition takes on a deeper meaning when it comes to children. Many educational and child-rearing institutions attempt, through their own unique systems and curricula, to help children acquire skills, values, and knowledge adapted to their readiness, capacities and needs. Not all methods are successful. The degree to which children acquire adequate skills, values and knowledge determines their future and their capacity to work as active members of their society.

However, kindergarten conditions in Palestine—in general—are showing signs of declining competencies in skills required to adequately supervise children during this delicate stage. In this regard, the following issues should be noted:

- Kindergartens are being established without any planning for the needs of the children and the needs of the various locales where they are established. Many of them are simply profit-making ventures. Most kindergartens lack professionally trained staff with a background in lower primary education.

- Most kindergartens focus, in their curricula, on preparing children for primary school in the areas of reading, writing, and basic math, while ignoring the importance of encouraging and developing children’s social skills, respect for authority figures and the need for regular supervised exercise periods designed to release excess energy in a healthful and positive manner.

- Some kindergartens are affiliated with political or religious groups, which means that children are indoctrinated with ideological values at the expense of developing their general mental capacities. Furthermore, kindergartens that are related to religious groups tend to infuse into children a set of traditional religious values that express the group’s religious views and beliefs.14

- Qualitative supervision and control over kindergartens does not exist. The role of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is restricted to mere technical supervision, and this authority is delegated over a vast array of departments within the institution.

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The public sector plays almost no role in education during the preschool and kindergarten years. It is an enterprise left entirely to the private sector, as well as to charitable and women’s organizations, and UNRWA. The Ministry of Education mounted a modest effort to organize kindergarten education by setting certain hygiene standards that must be met in order for a kindergarten license to be issued. However, the issue is still under debate. The following table provides some information regarding Palestinian kindergartens.

Other data received from the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau indicate that 70,255 pupils registered for the 2003-2004 school year, i.e. 7,177 pupils less than four years ago. This drop may be due to many reasons, possibly due to declining levels of public safety or the perception thereof due to the current circumstances (61% according to Survey No. 16, Development Studies Programme, June 2004). Furthermore, the citizens’ economic situation, especially with increasing unemployment rates, may prevent families from meeting all of their children’s needs, including kindergarten.

### Schooling

The number of students enrolled in West Bank and Gaza schools for the 2003-2004 school year totaled 1,017,443 students of both genders, and 37,226 teachers. It is clear, according to these statistical data, that the education sector is the largest in Palestine, whether in regard to the number of beneficiaries – students – or the labor force. Teachers constitute the largest employment sector in Palestine. Despite the tremendous expansion of this sector, it still enjoys the highest level of public confidence of all Palestinian sectors and institutions — 82.4 percent of Palestinians are confident in their school system.  

The education sector – especially public education – has undergone dramatic development since the establishment of the PNA in 1994, especially in the areas of employment, school construction, and improvement of school education quality.

### Supervising Education

Available statistics indicate that the PNA supervises 69.4 percent of all schools. These schools provide education to 69 percent of all Palestinian students. UNRWA supervises 24.7 percent of schools, thus providing education to 25 percent of the total number of students in the Palestinian territories. As for the private sector, it supervises 5.9 percent of schools with 6 percent of the total number of students.

Palestinian schools are divided, according to gender, into three categories: boys’ schools, which represent 34 percent of the total number of schools; girls’ schools, which also represent 34 percent of the total number; and coeducational schools, which represent 32 percent of schools. The percentage of students in coeducational schools is far less than the percentage of these schools in the total number of schools. As a matter of fact, available data show that the number of classes in these schools does not exceed 20 percent of the total number of classes. Coeducational schools are, for the most part, restricted to basic elementary levels (first to fourth grade), and are scattered throughout small towns or urban areas. A number of private schools also adopt the coeducation system. Separating genders in school reflects the conservative traditional educational vision, thus preventing the development of normal relationships between students of both genders in Palestinian schools.

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Box 2.6: The Five-Year Plan for Educational Reform (2001-2005)

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education crafted a new strategy aimed to keep up with the evolution of teaching methods and meet the challenges of a modern educational system. This strategy's main goals include: providing enrollment opportunities to all school-aged individuals, to improve the quality of education; to develop official and alternative education; to develop organizational capacities; and to develop human resources within the educational system.

The basic principles of educational development include: education is a human right; education is the basis for citizenship; education is a social and economic development tool; education sustains democratic governance; education is a continuing innovative and mutual process. It is certain that if these concepts are efficiently integrated within the educational process and the curricula they would play an essential role in empowering Palestinian individuals and society.

Drop-Out Rates

The act of "dropping out" or permanently leaving the school system in Palestine occurs for economic, social and educational reasons, as well as for other reasons related to political and security conditions. The main economic reasons are poverty and lack of job opportunity. Social reasons include family problems, custom and tradition, which mostly affect girls (in the 2001/2002 school year, 50% of the dropouts were girls).

From the educational point of view, the curricula are criticized for not doing enough to encourage creativity and scientific thinking.

Box 2.7: Palestinian Children on the Labor Market

Harsh economic and social conditions and the absence of legislation that protects children from exploitation have pushed Palestinian children into the job market to seek employment to support themselves and their families. The following conclusions discuss some of the results obtained following a study undertaken by the DSP, in collaboration with UNICEF:

Factors that push children to work: Participation in providing for the family’s livelihood and basic needs; the sense that schooling is futile and the desire to learn a trade; provision of the working child’s personal needs, especially in poor families.

Nature and place of work: Boys perform many types of work not suitable for their age group, such agricultural work, construction work, car repair, stonecutting, etc, while girls usually undertake tasks traditionally related to women such as sewing and house cleaning. These children are often compelled to work in places far away from their homes — a large percentage of them work inside Israel.

Risk sources for children: Working children are often exposed to numerous risks, namely the risk of being killed, shot or arrested by occupation forces; exposure to sharp objects, toxic gases and heavy machinery; sexual harassment or beating.

Work impacts on children’s health and sanity: Working children are exposed to severe physical stress causing chronic pain in various parts of their bodies and shortness of breath. Many children also feel afraid, insecure, anxious, frustrated, as well as many other emotions that affect their physical and mental health.

Relationship to school: The results of the study have shown that 70 percent of working children are school dropouts who claim that the harsh treatment they received from their teachers and peers was behind their decision to quit school. Others state that it was their academic incompetence that pushed them to drop out of school and seek other life opportunities. The need to help support the family is causing more and more children to quit school and join the job market.

early marriage was the reason behind 64 percent of drop-out cases involving female students). Educational and cultural reasons include falling behind in studies, in addition to poor education quality or hostile or improper behavior on the part of a teacher. Finally, political and security-related reasons include occupation measures such as arrests, restrictions on travel and reduced access to schools.

Despite all of the above reasons, data indicate a steady decline in the drop-out rate, which reached around 7 percent in elementary grades for both genders in the 2002-2003 school year. In secondary grades, drop-out rates average 3.7 percent (4.8% for female students and 2.6% for males).

Illiteracy in Palestinian Society

According to 2003 data, the illiteracy rate among individuals aged 15 and older is 3.7 percent for males and 12.6 percent for females. These data indicate a decrease from the rates recorded in 1997, when they amounted to 7.8 percent for men and 21.3 percent for women, thus reflecting a clear progression in the push for eradicating illiteracy in Palestinian society.

Point of Light 21: Universal Education: “Education That Excludes No One”

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has adopted the Universal Education concept, in collaboration with UNESCO, and with the support of the Diaconia Institute in Sweden. This program promotes the principle of equal rights to all student categories to integrate individuals with special needs into mainstream schools.

The Universal Education concept includes a series of procedures to train teachers to work with special needs students, providing them with adequate learning tools, and to adapt curricula to serve the needs of the largest number of student categories. This program has succeeded in integrating 259 schools by the end of 2003, providing mainstream education for 67 totally sight-impaired students, 1128 partially sight-impaired students, 67 totally or partially hearing-impaired students, and 563 physically disabled students.

Despite all of the above reasons, data indicate a steady decline in the drop-out rate, which reached around 7 percent in elementary grades for both genders in the 2002-2003 school year. In secondary grades, drop-out rates average 3.7 percent (4.8% for female students and 2.6% for males).

Point of Light 22: Adult Education Program (Yanoon)

Palestinian community and official institutions have endeavored, over the last years, to reduce the rate of illiteracy in Palestinian society, considering education one of the most important access routes to development and empowerment. There are many illiteracy eradication programs sponsored by various institutions. These programs often use the media because of its vital role in the developmental process, and in view of its capacity to create social trends. Programs presented by the media largely contribute to developmental and social issues, by spreading progressive developmental and cultural concepts and sponsoring public debates on subjects such as education, health, and unemployment.

Within that framework, Birzeit University’s Development Studies Programme produced the “Yanun” TV series for learning and civic culture, which is intended for adults and young people of both genders. This 17-part series deals with the issues of early marriage, pregnancy, children, gender, education, refugees, emigration, and the environment. This series allows men and women to learn at their own pace through television, using educational material based on active learning methods and personal initiative. Yanun also provides institutions involved in civic education with materials that deal with various social issues and which may be used with all social classes. The Yanun series was produced by a Palestinian production firm called “Smart Frame”.

Data indicate a steady decline in the drop-out rate.

Seventy percent of working children are school drop-outs.
Palestinian universities play a major role in the academic preparation of tens of thousands of Palestinian students. Illiteracy over the last six years. In addition, it should be noted that illiteracy rates among women are 3.4 times higher than among men. By comparing results from the West Bank with those collected in Gaza, illiteracy rates among men in Gaza are 7 percent higher than in the West Bank, while illiteracy among women in the Gaza Strip is 1 percent less than in the West Bank. Illiteracy rates according to residence clearly indicate the quality of educational and cultural services provided within various demographic areas, with cities recording the lowest rates, followed by camps, then villages. This clearly shows that camp residents (refugees) give great importance to education when compared to village residents. Furthermore, it is generally noted that the percentage of individuals who read and write is on an upward trend, despite the persistence of the gap between men and women in this regard.

Palestinian Curricula

School curricula, and especially the textbook, are the main tools for teaching and conveying educational messages to students. With the creation of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, a new vision for preparing Palestinian curricula was born, one which would reflect a uniquely Palestinian context and perspective, and stay abreast of all scientific and technical advancements. The Center for Developing Palestinian Curricula was established in 1995. The curricula plan was completed in 1998 and the new curricula launched in the 2000-2001 school year. These curricula have been put in place for eight grade levels. The plan is expected to be completed with implementation of the new curriculum for secondary school students (9th through 12th grade) in the 2005-2006 school year. The main educational developments taken into consideration within the Palestinian curriculum are:

1. Teaching English as of the first elementary grade.
2. Teaching Technology as of the fifth elementary grade.

Box 2.8: A Gender Analysis of the Palestinian Curriculum – Starting Again

The 2002 Human Development Report included an express criticism of the weak gender dimension in Palestinian curricula. The committee in charge of the curricula sent a memo to the work team explaining how keen committee leaders were to incorporate gender sensitive references into the new curricula. Despite improved gender sensitivity in some Palestinian curricula books, quantitative and qualitative analyses undertaken on a sample of textbooks, regarding masculine, feminine and neutral expressions appearing in content situations, roles or images, produced the following conclusions:

- Masculine idioms are much more commonly used than feminine idioms in the sampled books. The masculine form is usually chosen to illustrate situations and exercises, with men’s names and pictures of men surpassing female references. Most stories’ protagonists are male, and they are usually depicted as the strong, intelligent characters, i.e. hero, scientist, sportsman, writer, inventor... while women are presented in secondary roles, and often portrayed in situations that take place inside the home. Occasional instances can be found in which women are engaged in non-traditional work or activities.

- Stereotypical gender roles are confirmed through the frequent depiction of women in the home, performing housework and other traditional roles. References to female pioneers or women in non-traditional situations are too infrequent. Women are also typically portrayed as sentimental and non-analytical, while men are rational and methodical.

- Inconsistent or incorrect usage of gender-specific language. Frequently, textbooks do not correctly employ the proper forms of the root word, and colloquial expressions are frequently masculine in nature.
Points of Light 23 to 26: The Community-Based Development Role for Palestinian Universities

- **Point of Light 23 – Community Service Center (SSC) – Al Najah National University**: This initiative highlights and underscores the important socio-developmental role that can be played by Palestinian universities. The SSC’s objective is to empower individuals to solve their own social problems, and to strengthen the perceived value of volunteer work. The SSC offers an integrated program of three types of social services; guidance and referral, local social work, and volunteering. The SSC raised the profile of the university in the local community; promoted the concept of volunteerism by attracting large numbers of volunteers from the student body and the local area from all age groups and social classes; built capacity within other social organizations; and collaborated on numerous humanitarian programs that serve children, the elderly, the poor, victims of the Intifada, and patients afflicted with thalassemia.

- **Point of Light 24 – Community Action Center – Al-Quds University**: The center launched the Community Action Center as part of the Palestinian Curriculum for Physical Education with the slogan “For you, my country”. This initiative is based on the view that children and youth form the foundations of the future, and that communities must promote extracurricular activities that reinforce a sense of belonging within a collective Palestinian culture. The center implemented these activities during academic year 2003-2004, in ten schools spread throughout East Jerusalem and its suburbs, with the help of 45 student volunteers. Community Action Center activities included approximately 700 students, of both genders, aged between 11 and 14 years.

- **Point of Light 25 – Islamic University (Project of the Center for Assistive Technology to the Blind)**: The Assistive Technology Center was established in late 2000. Its objectives are to assist the blind in the use of advanced technology by training them to use computers and to produce materials and curricula specifically designed for blind students. Currently 61 blind students of both genders attend Islamic University.

- **Point of Light 26 – Women’s Community College (Specialization in Jewelry Making)**: The project idea is to provide free professional training to refugee women, from poor marginalized social classes, in the art of goldsmithing using the latest modern techniques in order to prepare them to enter the job market.

Nevertheless, despite the many positive changes in the Palestinian curricula and the complete evolution in some areas, its content is still subject to criticism. From the educational point of view, the curricula are criticized for not doing enough to encourage creativity and scientific thinking, and they are also criticized for not sufficiently reflecting gender sensitivity. Moreover, they are criticized for failing to meet the objective of realizing students’ full potential and encouraging creativity, especially because the introduction of the new curricula did not coincide with a strategy for training...
Box 2-9: Statistical Indicators for Higher Education in Palestine

- The number of students enrolled in university colleges and facilities in the Palestinian territories totals 123,600 students of both genders, representing 4 percent of the population. The students are distributed among 11 universities, 5 colleges and 25 community colleges.
- There are 9,000 employees working in higher education institutions, 45 percent of whom are academics.
- Higher education institutions provide 288 educational fields of study and award diplomas, bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees and PhDs.
- The higher education operational budget for academic year 2003-2004 totaled $85 million.
- Roughly $42 million in financial aid is provided to 150,000 students annually.
- The Ministry of Education established the National Board for Certification and Quality, which launched its operations in mid-2002.
- Higher education enrollment rates in the Palestinian territories rose at the rate of 6.4 percent for male students and 11.6 percent for female students between academic years 1997-1998 and 2002-2003. The statistically larger increase in women’s enrollment rates may reflect an increased social awareness of the value of education for women. In addition, difficult economic conditions have forced many male high school graduates directly into the workforce out of financial necessity within families.

17 For more information, please visit the website of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education: www.moe.gov.ps and the website of the Palestine National Information Center: www.pnic.gov.ps
SECTION FOUR: HEALTH STATUS INDICATORS

Israeli violence against Palestinian civilians is one of the primary causes of deteriorating health conditions in the Palestinian territories. During the current Intifada, occupation forces deliberately targeted the Palestinian service infrastructure, including the vital sectors of health and education.

According to Palestinian Ministry of Health estimates, the number of Palestinian injuries incurred as result of Israeli aggression during the period from 29 September 2000 to 31 December 2003 totaled 28,272, in addition to 2,726 killed, 707 of which were children. Israeli checkpoints hamper the work of medical services organizations by preventing paramedics from accessing injured persons and by refusing to allow ambulances to transport them to the hospital. At least 103 Palestinians died at checkpoints due to deliberate Israeli delays, in addition to 31 instances of miscarriage and 55 live births.

Twenty-nine Palestinian medics were killed by Israeli fire, while 424 others sustained injury while attempting to assist the wounded. Recorded data also show that 335 cases of aggression against ambulances occurred, in which 37 vehicles were totally destroyed. Other data show 945 cases of ambulances being prevented from reaching hospitals with patients on board, in addition to 285 instances of the deliberate destruction of health facilities in Palestine. Data also indicate that 40 percent of Palestinian families have experienced difficulty obtaining medical services for their children (44.6% in the West Bank and 32.1% in Gaza).

2-4-1 Health Conditions
Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rates recorded in the Palestinian territories for the past ten years show significant improvement. Prior to the establishment of the PNA, the infant mortality rate stood at 27.3 deaths per 1000 deliveries. That rate dropped to 25.5 deaths per 1000 deliveries in the five years following the establishment of the PNA. (In Gaza, however, the rate actually rose to 27.3 deaths per 1000 deliveries, without significant variations by

Data also indicate that 40 percent of Palestinian families have experienced difficulty obtaining medical services for their children.

Point of Light 27: Achievements of the Ministry of Health

Despite the existence of internal and external restrictions placed on the Ministry of Health, it still achieved a number of qualitative and quantitative gains in the quality its services and performance. The Ministry – as well as all other health sector institutions – successfully dealt with the large number of Palestinian deaths due to Israeli aggression, as well as with the partitioning and closure of its key service areas. The Ministry maintained service at its facilities throughout the Palestinian territories, including those in remote rural areas. Statistical indicators show progress in many areas, such as reduced infant mortality rates, expanded health insurance coverage, and improvements in the number and quality of services specifically provided to women.

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More than 64 percent of Palestinian families reported trouble obtaining food during the current Intifada.

Gender.) The improvement in the West Bank might basically be due to the combined efforts of the PNA’s Ministry of Health, the UNRWA, and NGOs, through the national immunization program, health education, and the increase in the number of motherhood care and primary health care centers.

Women’s Health

- **Mother’s mortality:** Women of reproductive age (15-49 years) represent 22.3 percent of the total number of women. Maternal mortality rates recorded in the Palestinian territories stood at 12.7 per 100,000 births (21.3 in Gaza and 6.7 in the West Bank).

- **Births:** 84 percent of births take place in hospitals, with hospital stays ranging between 1.4 days for natural births and 3.4 days for Caesarian-section births. Fifteen percent of births taking place in public hospitals are Caesarian sections. Miscarriage rates were reported at 113 and 107 cases out of 1000 pregnant women in Al Chifa and Khan Younis Hospitals, respectively.

- **Family Planning Programs:** The number of family planning clinics increased from 97 clinics in 1997 to 197 clinics in 2003. Available data show that 51.4 percent of married women use at least one family-planning method. The Ministry of Health provides contraceptives at affordable rates, i.e. 4 NIS (about $1) for a monthly supply of birth control pills (used by 34.8% of women) and 12 shekels (about $3) for an intrauterine device (used by 34.3% of women).

Nutritional Conditions

Shortages in food supplies resulted from the many sieges and lengthy curfews, as well as the high unemployment rate and overall deterioration of the economic situation. Many Palestinian families lost their primary source of income during this period. Twenty-six percent of Palestinian families were forced to rely on food donations. In addition, the chronic malnutrition rate among Palestinian children (below 5 yrs.) has reached 10.2 percent.

Health Authorities

Four separate sectors supervise Palestinian health care services: the public sector, local community organizations, private concerns and UNRWA. Seventy-eight hospitals operate in the Palestinian territories, with a total of 4,679 beds. Twenty-three hospitals are affiliated with the Ministry of Health and they contain 55.9 percent of the total number of beds. The ratio of beds per person is of 1 bed per 779 persons. The Ministry of Health increased the total number of beds available by 38.2 percent between 1999 and 2003. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2002 data showed 1 bed per 741 persons.

Hospitals are distributed by area of specialty as follows: 39 general hospitals, 21 maternity hospitals, 14 hospitals for specialized types of treatment and 4 rehabilitation and physical therapy centers. The practice of external referrals for specialized treatment continues, due to the fact that the Palestinian health sector has only the minimum required technical and human resources in major areas of medical specialization, such as cardiology and oncology, and has no capacity at all in less common areas of specialization. The ratio of physicians to population was 1.5 percent in 2002 (0.99% in 1997).
Box 2.10: Green Space in Palestinian Cities

A comprehensive public health agenda must include strategies for the preservation of natural and environmental resources in order to achieve improved quality of life and sustainable development. The creation of “green space” within urban areas – multipurpose public parks, playing fields for sports, public gardens, natural and manmade bodies of water – is universally considered beneficial to the population and to the natural environment. Natural green space within Palestinian cities is rapidly shrinking as a result of haphazard urban expansion and the lack of adequate zoning oversight by municipalities and other planning authorities.

The Israeli policies contribute to the destruction of green space as well, through the confiscation and partition of Palestinian land in order to build or expand settlements, constructing ring roads and prohibiting Palestinians from expanding their settled areas to accommodate population growth. There are currently 260 Israeli settlements built on Palestinian land, inhabited by 435,000 Israeli settlers. Seven hundred thirty kilometers of ring roads have been constructed (on Palestinian land) to link these settlements to one another.

Point of Light 28: Environmental Protection

The Road Safety and Environmental Protection Center has started to pave sports fields and children’s playground areas using shredded automobile tires to create environmentally friendly surfaces. Used tires are recycled into a sturdy but cushioned surface under play equipment areas, or even filled with earth and used as flower planters to beautify public places. Between the end of 2002 and 2004, seven such gardens were built in West Bank towns (Deir Ibzigh, Beit Aor Al Tahta, Qbayya, Qrawa Bani Zeid, Birzeit, Abou Qash, and Kafr Eddeek). Roughly 12,000 children, of both genders, are expected to reap the benefits from the new and innovative play areas.

Box 2.11: Obstacles Facing the Health Sector in Palestine

Many Palestinian health facilities are severely overcrowded, especially small local clinics serving areas where population growth has outstripped the growth of the health care infrastructure. Generally speaking, health care centers and hospitals are not situated according to the demographic distribution of the population.

Pharmacies attached to public hospitals and clinics, affiliated with UNRWA or located in small communities are constantly in short supply of prescription medications, especially drugs for chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Palestinian hospitals rarely perform complicated surgeries of the brain or heart or for cancerous tumors, due to a lack of qualified physicians and proper medical equipment.

SECTION FIVE: ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The Palestinian economy is undeniably vulnerable to a host of external influences, most notably the Israeli policies related to occupation. These policies include: restrictions on the movement of goods and people; denied access to urban centers, costly delays at ports and crossing terminals; and a system of geographic partitioning and security measures which adds significantly to the cost of overland transport of local products. The following economic indicators provide a statistical picture of the effects these policies have had on the Palestinian economic situation for the past three years.
2.5.1 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Economic Sectors

The Palestinian GDP dropped 13.1 percent between 2000 and 2003 to $4,019 million. GDP per capita for the same period dropped 24.4 percent to $1,108.70. The Palestinian Gross National Product (GNP) also dropped by 15.7 percent between 2000 and 2003, with a corresponding drop in GNP per capita of 28.8 percent.

Israeli occupation has affected the overall performance of individual Palestinian economic sectors as well. Total industrial sector losses amounted to $540,000,000 at the end of 2001. Employment in this sector decreased between 2000 and 2003 from 14.3 percent to 12.5 percent. The 2004 World Bank report covering the effects of the 27 months of the Intifada reported that only 7 percent of industrial facilities managed to maintain pre-Intifada production levels. The food, textile, leather and plastic industries were hit hardest. A slight change was recorded in the industrial sector’s contribution to the GDP for this period, but the numerical figure does not reflect the true extent of the regression in the industrial sector. Value added statistics for the industrial sector dropped 13 percent between 2000 and 2002.

Employment in the agricultural sector grew from 13.7 percent in 2000 to 15.7 percent in 2003. The agricultural sector absorbed some of the laborers who used to travel every day into Israel to work, but who became unemployed as result of the closing of the Israeli borders to Palestinian laborers. The employment increase in the sector is, therefore, not due to any structural improvements in its capacity to provide jobs. Agriculture’s contribution to the GDP rose from 8.5 percent to 9.3 percent in 2002, although the sector’s value added figures for the same period dropped.

The Building and Construction Sector depends heavily on the importation of basic construction materials (cement, steel and wood) from Israel. Work on hundreds of public and private construction projects was halted during much of the Intifada, as well as in the factories that process the imported raw materials into various components used in the building industry.

Tourism, however, was undeniably the hardest hit sector of the Palestinian economy. The industry suffered a near-total shutdown, causing regression in all related economic indicators. The number of hotels in operation dropped from 106 in 2000 to 76 by 2003. The number of guests and overnight stays dropped 86 percent as of the second quarter 2003.

The financial sector, which includes banking and capital markets, was also greatly affected. After posting total net profits of $21,900,000 in 2000, the collective net profits of commercial banks operating in Palestinian territories dropped to $8,600,000 at the end of 2003, despite the fact that their assets increased in value, from $412.4 to $520 million during the same period. Funds on deposits fell from 38.4 percent to 30.4 percent, which indicates regression of credit quality within the banking system. The newly established Palestine

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The creation of “green space” within urban areas is universally considered beneficial to the population and to the natural environment.

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22 Visit the web site of the Palestine National Information Center: www.pnic.gov.ps
Securities Exchange lost 40 percent of its value during the first year of the Intifada.  

2-5-2 Foreign Trade

Foreign trade constitutes one of the basic elements of the Palestinian Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Its impact on the GDP has always been negative, considering that historically, Palestine’s imports have always exceeded its exports. Trade with Israel alone accounts for 77 percent of Palestine’s overall foreign trade. Consequently, the closures and sieges occurring during the Intifada deeply impacted the Palestinian balance of trade.

Exports dropped nearly 42 percent in 2002, while imports fell by 41.5 percent, compared to their 1999 levels. The relative weight of imports in foreign trade being much higher than that of exports, the decrease in import levels actually improved the Palestinian trade deficit by 41.4 percent. Although reduction of the national trade deficit is ostensibly a desirable outcome, the drop in imports was in fact accompanied by an equal drop in the level of exports, which illustrates that the overall Palestinian foreign trade situation is structurally flawed.

Palestinian export levels are very sensitive to events on the ground, a fact that only serves to exacerbate the already existing trade deficit. Low levels of exports are attributed to many factors: (1) the high cost of transporting the goods from the manufacturing location to final markets, due to Israeli obstacles, thus increasing their overall cost and reducing their competitiveness on foreign markets; (2) importers stopped carrying Palestinian-made goods in favor of products from other countries whose delivery capabilities are more dependable; and (3) Palestinian producers focus on meeting local demand for goods and forego opportunities to penetrate foreign markets due to the numerous logistical difficulties associated with manufacturing for export.

2-5-3 The Labor Market

The Palestinian job market and its associated indicators clearly reflect the impact of Israeli actions directed at Palestinian labor during the Intifada. The number of Palestinians working in Israel has dropped by more than 50 percent between 2000 and 2003, down to 57,300 workers in 2003. This loss of Israeli jobs further aggravated an already serious unemployment problem in the Palestinian territories where jobless rates hover at 25.6 percent of the total workforce, and spike to 38.4 percent among young males.

Employment levels in Gaza are chronically lower than in the West Bank, with unemployment rates reaching 29.2 percent in Gaza compared to 23.8 percent in the West Bank. Furthermore, unemployment affects men (26.9%) more than it affects women (18.6%) probably because of the high proportion of males working in Israel unemployed after the onset of the current conflict. Total participation in the workforce also dropped slightly, from 41.5 percent to 40.4 percent.

Palestinian women have a lower rate of workforce participation than many other countries. Palestinian women constitute only 12.8 percent of the work force (9.2% in Gaza and 14.7% in the West Bank) It was also noted from manpower surveys that the average daily wage has increased both in the West Bank and Israel, reaching 72.2 and 125.1 NIS, respectively. The wage increase is

26 Ministry of Finance, General Budget Data, various years.

Palestine - Human Development Report 2004
Arab nations pledged $10 million per month to pay the wages of Palestinian civil servants.

The published budget data of the PNA shows a chronic deficit. Attributed to decreased available Palestinian manpower in Israel, and the depreciation of the shekel, the primary wage currency. Average daily wages in Gaza remained virtually unchanged at 52 NIS per day.

### 2.5.4 General Treasury

General Treasury revenue in the Palestinian territories is derived from three sources: (1) taxes levied on commercial activity undertaken in the Palestinian territories; (2) employment taxes levied by Israel, on behalf of the PNA, then transferred back to the PNA in the form of revenue; (3) aid given to Palestinians by international donors. Revenues from these three sources have dramatically dropped over the last three years, with revenue from general commerce taxes decreasing by 42.5 percent as compared to their pre-Intifada levels, down to $207 million in 2003. The loss of tax revenue is due to the general slowdown in Palestinian economic activity.

Employment tax revenues, which constitute more than 60 percent of the PNA's budget, dropped by 46.2 percent to $324 million. Israel habitually withholds tax revenue due to PNA as a form of collective punishment. Israel transferred a portion of the monies due at the beginning of 2003 after the appointment of the new Palestinian Minister of Finance. However, the level of uncertainty surrounding the continuance of regular revenue transfers remains high, and depends in large part on the whims of the Israeli government.

International aid is the third significant source of Palestinian treasury revenue, and total support levels have changed considerably since the beginning of the Intifada. Arab nations pledged $10 million per month to pay the wages of Palestinian civil servants. Despite wavering commitments on the part of some Arab nations to pay their respective shares, more than $920 million was transferred by the end of 2003. Total aid received over the last three years exceeded $3 billion, in comparison with the $1.47 billion received between 1998 and 2000. Fifty percent of foreign aid goes to job creation programs and humanitarian and emergency relief while the remainder is used to support the functions of the PNA's current budget. Generally speaking, efforts to rehabilitate and expand the Palestinian infrastructure and its manufacturing sector received little funding during the Intifada.

Changes in the PNA's sources of revenue have had an impact on the general budget deficit and on the PNA's public debt. The PNA's published budget data shows a chronic deficit, as well as a new off-budget “accounts payable” line item totaling $50 million appearing in 2000. The accounts payable item represented remittances or checks issued by the PNA for which no official budget allocation exists. The “payable” amount rose to $155 million in 2001 and when added to the actual

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**Box 2.12: The Increase in Public Debt**

During the ten years since the inception of the PNA, there was a constant increase in its indebtedness, until it amounted, in the year 2000, i.e. six years after its founding, to roughly $392 million. During the first year of the Intifada, the public debt rose to more than $840 million. This clearly depicts the magnitude of the financial crisis endured by the PNA since its creation. The public debt continued to increase until it reached its peak in 2003, when it exceeded $990 million.

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27 *Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, Consumer Price Index.*
The 2003 budget showed substantial improvement in that there was no scheduled shortfall due to increased foreign assistance. The amount of the deficit covered by foreign aid amounted to $747 million. In addition, employment taxes released by Israel on account from previous years amounted to $480 million, of which the PNA used $415 million to settle accumulated overdue amounts. Moreover, loan premiums amounting to $65 million were also settled, thus reducing the budget deficit to zero.

In view of the size PNA's financial problems, it is easy to see the effect of this ongoing crisis on the government's level of public spending, as well as the consequences in terms of reduced levels of public services.

2-5-5 Prices and Living Standards

The cost of living and the prices of most consumer goods have noticeably increased since the start of the current Intifada. Data collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that record-high consumer prices were reached during 2003, when prices stood at 137.7 percent, i.e. an increase of 37.7 percent compared to prices in 1996. This increase came as a result of a rise in the index prices of the majority of basic consumer goods classified according to key expenditure groups. The highest price increase was recorded in the transport and communication group, where prices rose by more than 73.5 percent, from their 1996 levels, while average prices dropped in the entertainment goods and services group. Another factor has also played a key role in price increase — the sharp depreciation of the Israeli shekel over the past few years. Furthermore, there appear to be considerable differences in price levels between various Palestinian regions, whereas the consumer price index rose by 40.8 percent in the West Bank, while it only rose by 36.1 percent and 27.7 percent in Jerusalem and Gaza, respectively.28

This necessarily has an impact on the living standards of Palestinian families, especially taking into consideration the high unemployment rates currently recorded all over the Palestinian territories, and the drop in (or total absence of) income for the majority of Palestinian families, 72.3 percent of which depend on earned income to cover their expenses. The results of the survey undertaken by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics have shown that more than 35.5 percent of families in the Palestinian territories have suffered from poverty in 2003, according to consumer spending patterns.

On the other hand, the relative poverty index has shown that 67.6 percent of families have suffered from poverty according to income, considering that the average poverty line for a six-member family is set at 1,800 Israeli shekels in 2003 (around $395). Survey results also show the importance of aid in alleviating poverty among Palestinians. More than 64.5 percent of families describe themselves as poor, but assert that direct financial aid would help lift them out of poverty. Seventy percent of families surveyed stated that providing job opportunities is the main factor which would serve to change their financial circumstances.

SECTION SIX: GENDER INDICATORS

Universal participation in development is considered a basic human right according to United Nations resolutions, and everyone must take part in the development process in order to reap its fruits. The UN’s Millennium Development Goals contain a special clause dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Women’s participation in development bears double importance in the correlation between participation and development. No real development is possible without women’s participation. This importance is also rooted in the existing gap between men and women, when it comes to opportunities, choices and living conditions.

Gender is a key element of the human development concept. Measuring women’s participation in the developmental process is key development indicator and a comparison guide. Understanding that human development is “a process that expands the choices that are available to people,” there is a resulting need to aggressively promote true equality between men and women.

In Palestine, statistical data indicate weakness in women’s participation in the official development process, whether in the job market or in public institutions’ decision-making procedures. Contradictions exist between what these indicators state quantitatively and what they qualitatively signify. Additionally, some indicators are misleading regarding women’s participation in the development process. For instance, in spite of the increase in women’s education levels, there is no corresponding increase in women’s participation in professional occupations. Although women constitute roughly half of all university and higher education institution graduates, women’s participation in the

Box 2.13: Feminization of Poverty

There is a close relationship between female poverty in Palestinian society and the nature of the male-dominated job market. A closer look at the job market reveals a horizontal and vertical segregation between men and women, which, in itself, has a negative effect on women, especially those who live below the poverty line. In 2002, poverty rates among female-headed families reached 30 percent, while they only reached 20 percent among other families. According to the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, there is a drop in the participation of women in the workforce (13.4% in 2000, down to 12.7% in mid-2004), which constitutes one of the lowest female labor force participation rates in the world. As for unemployment among those who are aged 15 and older, the rate is 30.5 percent among men and 19.1 percent among women. This does not constitute a positive indicator for women, because the qualitative significance of this rate and its relationship to job and education opportunities must be taken into account. Moreover, women receive lower wages than men, in all sectors, with men’s average daily wage reaching 78.1 shekels compared to 63.1 shekels for women.

30 Such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Convention for Eradication of all Types of Discrimination against Women 1979, which stipulate the necessity for empowerment of women.
job market reached only 12.8 percent in 2003. At the same time, increases in early marriage rates and a fertility rate of 5.9 children per family are observed.

Available data shows that women’s access to decision-making and policy-implementation positions is still very limited, especially when one considers the sacrifices and suffering they endure as result of the occupation. These data indicated that women constituted 49 percent of voters in the first legislative elections of 1996, but only 3.7 percent of the total number of candidates, and they secured only 5.6 percent of Palestinian Legislative Council seats. As for Ministry leadership positions, women headed only two out of 25 ministries — the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs — from 1996 to 1998; and then only one ministry — the Ministry of Social Affairs — from 1998 to 2003. During the Al Aqsa Intifada, there were three cabinet shuffles, none of which included appointments of women, until the creation of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in 2003.

As for local council leadership, the percentage of women appointed to the councils did not exceed 5 percent of the total number of appointees. In the policy-making process, women held 15.2 percent of director generalships and higher positions, 12 percent of directorship positions, and 25 percent of section head positions. Furthermore, the percentage of female civil servants tends to increase as the relative importance of the position decreases. Finally, women’s participation in the judicial system is very limited, and only 7 percent of all judges are female (10 judges, including 6 in the Gaza Strip).

Several reasons may lay behind the marginalization of women at the policy- and decision-making levels. In addition to the occupation’s hindrance of all development processes, there is a strong connection between a woman’s socio-economic status and her ability to reach decision-making positions. Poverty reports show a clear increase in the percentage of families headed by women (11 %), and that the overall percentage of poor families headed by women is greater than that of poor families headed by men.

Furthermore, the early marriage and school drop-out (especially at secondary levels) rates are related to popular culture, with female drop-out rates reaching 4.8 percent in 2003 (at the secondary school level), compared to 2.6 percent among males. Overall, the drop-out rate for this period declined (8.2% in 1998). This may be due to the PNA’s efforts to improve educational services, and the role played by various institutions to raise public awareness as to the importance of female education.

Reasons behind female drop-out rates often include early marriage. Nineteen is the average marriage age for women in Palestine, which means that half of the girls get married under the age of 19. One can assume that at this age, they are not sufficiently qualified, either academically or professionally, to participate in the job market, and that they are more vulnerable to the threats of discrimination, domestic abuse and violence.

The creation of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was not accompanied by a comprehensive commitment to create national public policy that would contribute to improving the conditions of women. Female representation in ministries, parties and communities organizations is still very limited. An indication of the weak levels of political participation of Palestinian women is demonstrated by the decreasing number of women in executive, legislative and local institutions. Female representation on the Palestinian National Council does not exceed 8

Women’s access to decision-making and policy implementation positions is still very limited.

Women’s participation in the judiciary system is very low.

Eleven percent of all Palestinian families living below the poverty line in Palestine are headed by women.
Point of Light 29: The National Campaign to Promote Women’s Participation in Elections

Palestinian women have taken part, throughout Palestine’s recent contemporary history, in the national liberation movement. Women’s active participation is needed so that progress can be made in improving the condition of all women in Palestine at the social, political and economic level.

Thus, since the inception of the PNA, many women’s initiatives were launched, seeking to improve women’s conditions and enhance their participation in political and social life. The “Campaign for Women’s Participation in Elections” was the latest of these initiatives. It coincided with the public debate with regard the laws that organize local and legislative elections. The campaign emphasized the need to adopt laws that promote a policy of positive intervention on behalf of women, by establishing a quota for 20 percent female representation on local councils and on the Legislative Council.

The campaign was launched by the General Palestinian Women’s Union, which is a popular organization of national stature which serves as an umbrella organization for a large number of women’s groups. The Union launched an initiative to open a public dialogue among women’s groups, political parties, and other civil society organizations, in order to secure the largest possible support for the female quota concept. This campaign’s activities expanded to include many Palestinian regions, with dozens of workshops and training sessions held on the topics of women’s participation and elections.

The campaign’s various activities increased levels of support for the female quota concept within Palestinian society, with various public opinion polls indicating that 70 percent of Palestinians favored the establishment of a female quota. The campaign also enjoyed the support of 45 Legislative Council members, and achieved its first success with the amendment of the local elections law, with Article 29 now stipulating: “The following text shall be added to Article 47 of the Local Council Elections Law No. 5 of 1996: ‘Whenever there are female candidates, female representation on any local council board may not be less than two seats among those having secured the highest number of votes’.

In municipal and local councils, the percentage of women never exceeded 1 percent until the elections held in late 2004, when the percentage leapt to 17 percent. Moreover, women’s organizations have not yet attained the required level of effort coordination to actively promote women’s issues.